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Per Capita Food Spending

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When adjusted for inflation, U.S. per capita spending of urban households on food for consumption at home declined more than 6 percent from 1980 to 1988, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. On the other hand, inflation-adjusted (real) per person away-from-home food spending rose more than 10 percent. The net of these two changes was a small decline in real total per person food spending.

These averages, however, mask the fact that some population groups spent much less in 1988, after adjusting for inflation, while others spent more. For example, total food spending grew rapidly for single people, while spending declined sharply for households with six or more members. Single people spent almost twice as much on weekly food per person as five-member households—\$36.73 versus \$19.23 in 1988.

Per person food spending declines as household size increases, but larger households have a much larger total food bill than smaller households. In 1988, for example, one-person households spent \$36.73 weekly and five-person households spent \$96.15. Nevertheless, household food spending does not increase proportionately with household size because larger households can take advantage of economies of size (such as buying in bulk), tend to have more children (who eat smaller portions), and tend to buy a different mix of food.

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Income and Race Affect Food Spending

Household income influenced food expenditures. In 1988, for example, lower income households spent \$19.50 weekly per person on food compared with \$31.50 for the wealthiest households, a 62-percent difference. The highest income households also experienced the largest

increases in per person spending between 1980 and 1988, probably because they ate out more often and bought more convenience foods.

Food spending also differed significantly by race. Households headed by blacks tended to spend considerably less per person on food than did households headed by whites or other races. In 1988, white households spent \$27.03 per



Food Prices and Expenditures

Table 1.
Northeasterners Spent the Most on Food in the 1980's

Item	Weekly per-person food expenditures								
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
	<i>1988 dollars</i>								
All urban households	25.80	25.31	26.16	26.21	25.83	27.13	25.94	26.25	25.68
Number of household members:									
One	33.22	34.62	35.26	32.37	34.79	36.86	34.55	35.36	36.73
Two	31.30	31.25	31.42	33.35	30.29	33.59	32.82	32.89	31.59
Three	24.92	25.24	25.32	24.47	26.56	26.42	25.44	25.59	25.48
Four	23.33	22.35	24.31	24.47	23.63	23.83	22.44	23.02	22.47
Five	21.70	19.95	21.18	20.96	20.79	20.98	19.82	20.74	19.23
Six or more	19.03	17.46	16.62	16.50	17.64	17.46	16.68	15.62	15.83
Single female parent with children	16.96	18.69	17.69	16.38	18.31	18.45	16.23	18.22	17.65
Income groups:									
Poorest 20 percent	22.45	20.90	21.24	19.26	18.97	21.24	20.47	19.42	19.50
Second-poorest 20 percent	24.26	21.57	22.23	21.47	22.13	22.58	22.87	23.30	22.67
Middle 20 percent	24.71	25.71	25.58	24.35	25.80	25.83	26.21	26.31	25.19
Second-richest 20 percent	28.74	27.44	28.43	27.63	27.38	28.58	27.28	27.33	28.31
Richest 20 percent	30.66	32.87	33.35	35.66	33.84	35.44	33.92	34.31	31.50
Race:									
White	26.99	26.44	27.36	27.54	27.21	28.45	27.22	27.56	27.03
Black	18.10	17.93	18.33	17.71	16.98	18.70	17.65	18.42	17.89
Other ¹	24.07	23.07	24.16	26.18	24.48	25.99	24.80	22.27	22.11
Age of household head:									
Under 25 years (nonstudent)	23.63	21.67	23.17	22.36	23.61	23.33	23.65	23.15	21.99
25 to 34 years	25.22	22.92	24.81	23.59	22.98	23.87	23.18	23.55	23.82
35 to 44 years	24.11	25.45	24.38	25.40	24.69	26.09	25.46	25.49	24.62
45 to 54 years	26.61	26.92	28.55	28.92	29.13	30.15	28.66	28.10	28.06
55 to 64 years	29.30	28.90	31.12	31.44	29.38	31.78	29.84	30.66	28.98
Over 64 years	27.38	26.86	26.37	27.31	27.65	29.41	27.32	28.36	27.26
Region and city size									
MSA's ² in the:									
Northeast	27.28	26.65	26.84	28.62	27.53	28.94	29.12	27.57	28.04
Midwest	26.19	24.07	25.26	25.72	25.02	26.06	25.08	25.97	25.23
South	24.19	25.26	25.48	25.60	24.95	25.98	24.33	25.14	24.86
West	26.27	27.58	29.93	28.49	28.52	31.26	27.53	28.56	26.17
Other urban areas	24.60	21.61	22.14	20.10	21.94	21.79	22.21	22.24	23.10

¹Includes American Indians, Aleuts, Eskimos, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. ²Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA's) are, except in New England, a county or a group of contiguous counties that contain at least one city of 50,000 or more inhabitants. In New England, MSA's consist of towns or cities. Contact: James Blaylock (202) 219-0862.

Food Prices and Expenditures

Table 2.
Spending for At-home Food Use Has Declined, Especially for Meats

Item	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
<i>Food expenditure index (1980=100) ¹</i>								
Total food (excluding alcohol)	98.1	101.4	101.6	100.1	105.2	100.6	101.8	99.6
Food away from home	97.6	106.6	109.5	105.2	112.0	109.6	112.8	110.2
Lunch	104.0	110.1	111.3	109.9	118.0	114.0	124.1	122.9
Dinner	102.6	109.7	119.8	111.2	124.9	118.2	120.9	117.4
Other meals and snacks	79.4	96.4	90.1	88.1	80.7	88.2	82.2	79.7
Food at home	98.4	99.0	97.5	97.4	101.5	95.8	95.8	93.7
Cereal and bakery products	97.1	102.0	95.2	97.7	104.2	97.1	101.1	98.8
Cereal and cereal products	100.9	105.4	98.3	101.2	105.3	105.3	113.8	111.4
Flour and prepared flour mixes	94.2	100.5	84.7	82.5	87.0	71.7	71.0	69.0
Cereal	101.9	106.2	97.8	101.4	109.7	109.3	127.9	124.0
Rice, pasta and cornmeal	96.1	103.2	92.3	103.2	95.4	101.6	95.8	96.5
Bakery products	94.4	100.4	93.9	96.2	103.7	93.6	95.6	93.4
White bread	92.2	100.7	91.6	85.9	86.6	71.8	75.0	62.8
Other bread	117.1	112.6	117.5	113.6	132.1	136.1	146.6	144.9
Fresh biscuits, rolls, and muffins	91.1	100.1	97.4	100.0	103.9	102.7	110.0	108.1
Cakes and cupcakes	90.0	86.0	89.4	98.0	106.5	98.0	88.5	83.6
Cookies	95.6	102.6	98.9	109.7	114.5	100.5	105.9	109.9
Crackers and other bread products	103.6	97.1	91.6	93.4	107.5	97.0	94.0	102.5
Doughnuts and sweet rolls	90.7	109.2	83.6	86.5	97.2	87.0	90.8	81.5
Frozen and refrigerated bakery and fresh pies, tarts, and turnovers	81.9	92.8	75.2	85.6	88.3	78.2	75.1	84.4
Meats, poultry, fish, and eggs	97.6	93.6	92.3	89.8	92.1	85.5	80.6	75.8
Meats	96.6	90.9	89.4	85.7	88.5	81.9	75.7	71.9
Beef	98.1	93.9	89.6	85.7	86.4	84.1	77.1	69.6
Ground beef (excluding canned)	99.0	97.9	92.9	93.8	91.4	95.6	96.7	87.8
Chuck roast	104.9	85.8	88.5	75.2	65.2	72.2	54.1	51.9
Round roast	66.6	66.6	76.8	67.7	70.5	71.2	58.6	48.5
Round steak	82.8	81.2	66.4	77.5	68.0	61.4	41.7	44.7
Sirloin steak	107.7	116.3	126.3	104.1	115.8	103.4	86.5	80.2
Other beef (excluding canned)	108.8	99.7	92.2	87.9	96.0	74.2	79.9	69.3
Pork	88.5	78.4	81.8	77.5	81.7	71.4	63.7	64.1
Bacon	94.5	82.2	89.3	85.8	82.9	77.4	68.7	72.8
Pork chops	91.1	82.5	83.2	79.0	84.0	72.1	65.5	66.5
Ham (excluding canned)	76.7	68.1	72.7	61.5	76.4	61.9	60.4	56.3
Other pork	87.2	74.7	76.1	76.7	78.5	64.7	52.3	56.6
Pork sausage	107.7	96.6	104.4	97.9	105.7	92.4	79.7	74.7
Canned ham	69.8	86.5	63.3	66.5	66.0	64.5	60.6	40.8
Other meats	102.4	99.4	98.2	93.7	103.4	90.1	89.1	88.2
Frankfurters	95.8	91.9	92.8	92.8	100.3	90.6	91.5	88.9
Bologna, liverwurst, and salami	101.6	97.4	90.5	90.1	88.7	92.2	87.5	79.4
Other lunch meats	107.3	105.8	104.2	105.0	112.6	94.9	96.8	101.7
Lamb and miscellaneous meats	98.2	90.1	92.2	68.3	101.1	55.0	61.7	59.1
Poultry	101.2	103.0	98.3	96.5	99.1	96.4	97.8	88.5
Chicken	102.5	102.2	100.5	96.8	96.7	93.3	97.7	83.1
Fresh whole	97.8	94.8	93.4	78.4	77.4	62.3	55.5	43.1
Fresh and frozen parts	106.2	104.4	102.5	104.9	112.2	115.2	128.3	113.0
Other poultry	95.0	112.6	88.5	99.7	99.9	98.8	100.8	107.5
Fish and seafood	104.4	100.8	111.3	114.6	111.4	98.1	92.2	83.8
Canned	98.1	84.8	87.1	89.1	89.0	88.2	83.7	74.4
Fresh and frozen	104.4	109.7	120.3	126.7	121.0	104.3	92.7	86.9
Eggs	96.1	102.6	90.7	84.5	89.6	83.9	81.3	79.5
Dairy	99.2	104.6	100.1	99.9	105.7	98.4	105.1	102.6
Fresh milk and cream	100.9	104.4	97.5	97.7	100.3	93.6	97.7	96.5
Fresh whole milk	94.6	102.7	88.4	87.8	83.1	73.5	72.2	60.9
Other fresh milk and cream	107.7	106.8	111.3	113.0	130.0	125.2	140.3	152.7
Cheese	96.2	103.5	99.8	93.2	100.6	93.0	105.1	102.0
Ice cream and related products	94.8	102.2	109.5	115.5	124.6	118.6	122.8	120.4
Other dairy products	92.7	90.1	98.4	106.4	122.7	109.0	105.6	93.2

Continued—

Food Prices and Expenditures

Table 2.

Spending for At-home Food Use Has Declined, Especially for Meats (continued)

Item	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
<i>Food expenditure index (1980=100)¹</i>								
Fruits and vegetables	99.8	100.8	100.9	96.1	97.6	95.2	96.3	93.5
Fresh fruits	106.3	106.0	107.6	99.7	94.3	97.3	94.1	93.0
Apples	118.4	101.0	105.5	100.8	101.8	94.0	93.7	91.5
Bananas	114.6	137.5	115.1	124.6	142.5	135.6	136.6	136.5
Oranges	89.2	69.5	98.3	64.6	68.2	75.2	60.1	50.2
Other fresh fruits	104.8	112.6	111.3	109.1	91.7	99.7	98.2	114.2
Fresh vegetables	97.9	101.8	99.7	92.6	98.1	93.0	97.5	91.6
Potatoes	103.6	104.9	97.6	97.8	95.7	92.7	97.8	81.6
Lettuce	103.7	96.6	94.2	91.1	82.5	86.3	71.3	65.4
Tomatoes	96.1	107.1	90.3	86.1	87.8	89.9	93.5	81.3
Other fresh vegetables	99.4	101.4	104.2	93.0	103.7	94.4	107.1	102.1
Processed fruits	97.5	98.1	98.6	93.7	101.6	96.1	97.3	97.2
Frozen fruits and fruit juices	98.3	94.5	89.7	79.1	85.4	78.1	69.4	70.3
Other fruit juices	97.5	100.3	102.0	96.8	110.0	100.1	109.5	108.4
Canned and dried fruits	93.4	96.3	101.6	105.6	111.1	93.9	106.5	110.0
Processed vegetables	94.1	94.0	91.3	93.9	90.7	88.6	90.5	88.5
Frozen vegetables	96.9	95.0	91.4	102.5	92.4	91.7	95.8	99.9
Canned beans and corn	88.8	84.2	84.2	89.2	79.3	79.9	77.7	72.2
Other processed vegetables	94.8	92.3	93.6	94.0	93.7	94.0	96.4	87.6
Sugar and sweets	92.6	92.8	98.7	100.5	103.4	96.9	91.7	95.9
Candy and chewing gum	93.7	94.8	110.4	112.6	116.0	111.1	109.0	112.9
Sugar and artificial sweeteners	89.2	92.1	88.9	87.4	93.8	82.0	81.3	79.0
Other sweets	98.3	103.0	91.8	97.4	102.5	90.5	80.1	85.4
Fats and oils	99.5	101.3	93.5	94.3	100.2	88.4	85.2	87.4
Butter	92.9	102.2	89.8	87.6	97.6	86.5	74.3	63.9
Margarine	97.5	96.7	85.1	86.6	92.2	75.3	77.0	80.6
Other fat and oil products	101.7	102.4	97.3	98.7	106.7	93.3	91.0	96.1
Other fats, oils, and salad dressings	96.8	102.2	93.9	97.2	109.6	96.1	97.4	100.0
Nondairy cream substitutes	97.3	89.7	92.0	89.6	86.9	85.3	67.7	76.2
Beverages	95.9	94.9	97.8	99.9	104.7	101.7	105.2	107.4
Carbonated drinks	101.8	100.8	102.7	105.6	114.7	112.4	122.9	130.0
Coffee	99.0	94.0	96.4	95.4	95.5	80.0	77.3	71.0
Roasted	105.6	97.7	104.0	105.2	108.1	86.2	94.2	77.6
Instant and freeze-dried	91.8	90.1	88.3	84.7	81.7	72.3	57.2	63.9
Other noncarbonated drinks and beverages	91.2	92.6	104.9	105.0	104.8	115.7	105.3	111.2
Miscellaneous foods	102.9	107.1	108.5	119.2	126.7	122.1	123.8	127.7
Soups	101.9	107.5	95.2	100.7	112.2	101.6	111.5	114.4
Frozen prepared foods	102.5	104.1	118.9	142.2	145.3	137.3	126.4	137.3
Potato chips, snacks, and nuts	98.9	102.9	114.1	120.2	133.5	122.5	130.5	135.9
Seasonings, olives, pickles, and relishes	89.9	90.1	86.8	84.6	95.1	92.9	82.6	85.4
Sauces, gravies, and other condiments	95.6	110.3	98.4	100.2	108.8	102.1	102.1	106.3
Miscellaneous prepared foods ²	124.2	116.9	114.7	134.5	152.3	147.4	141.8	133.1
Other prepared foods	105.4	114.0	98.8	121.7	124.2	140.4	151.1	158.5
Alcoholic beverages	90.7	91.1	94.5	84.7	91.6	77.4	80.9	72.8
Alcoholic beverages at home	83.4	88.6	90.9	79.2	85.6	74.8	78.3	68.6
Beer and ale	84.5	84.9	86.8	83.9	89.4	84.1	87.2	76.4
Whiskey	83.5	101.9	94.4	57.0	65.2	51.5	46.3	45.8
Wine	89.6	95.7	108.8	87.0	105.9	84.2	94.1	76.9
Other alcoholic beverages	72.6	81.3	85.1	73.7	65.6	55.7	59.9	54.4
Alcoholic beverages away from home	101.4	96.0	103.9	101.9	114.5	95.2	99.9	96.9

¹Index constructed by dividing spending (in constant dollars) for each food group each year by 1980 spending levels. ²Includes prepared salads and desserts and baby food categories.

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person on food and black households spent \$17.89, a 51-percent difference. Helping to explain this difference is that white households were generally smaller, 2.5 versus 2.8 members, and had higher incomes, \$29,950 versus \$21,332.

Other groups—including American Indians, Eskimos, and Asians—spent 18 percent less than whites but 24 percent more than blacks. For both black and white households, real per person weekly food spending was about the same in 1988 as in 1980. But American Indians, Eskimos, and Asians decreased their spending by \$2.

Age and Location Also Factor In

In general, per person food spending tends to increase as the household head ages, until age 65. The major reason is the increase in income associated with rising age, at least until retirement.

Households headed by a person under age 34 spent less per person on food in 1988 than in 1980. Other households spent more or about the same.

In 1988, urban households in the West and Northeast spent more per person on food than those in the South or Midwest (table 1). Northeasterners tended to spend the most and Southerners the least. Some of these differences are caused by regional variations in food prices, differences in household incomes, and purchases of a different mix of food.

Between 1980 and 1988, real per person spending increased almost 3 percent in the Northeast and South, stayed about the same in the West, and declined almost 4 percent in the Midwest.



The Mix of Food in Grocery Sacks Changes

Foodstuffs posting the most rapid growth in real at-home spending between 1980 and 1988 were: cereals, up 24 percent; breads (other than white), up 45 percent; fresh milk (other than whole), up 53 percent; bananas and frozen prepared foods, both up 37 percent; carbonated drinks, up 30 percent; and potato chips and related snacks, up 36 percent (table 2). Among the biggest losers were white bread, beef and pork products, fresh

whole milk, oranges, lettuce, and butter. At-home expenditures on alcoholic beverages also fell significantly.

One interesting trend is the changing at-home consumption patterns for foods that are obviously close substitutes. For example, there is a pronounced trend away from drinking fresh whole milk, down almost 40 percent between 1980 and 1988, to drinking lowfat fresh milk, up over 53 percent. Likewise, spending

on white bread dropped about 37 percent, while spending for other types of bread rose 45 percent.

One may be tempted to conclude that consumers appear to be shifting consumption toward products they perceive as healthier. However, increased consumption of other foods, such as cola drinks, up 30 percent, and snack foods, up 36 percent, contradict this conclusion. ■