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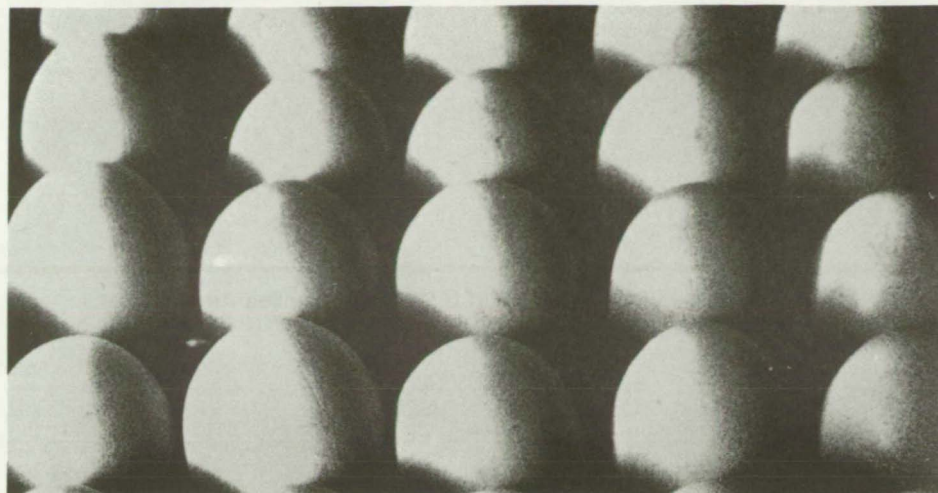
Good Protein Buys

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When price-conscious consumers enter the supermarket, they might wonder if the beef chuck roast on sale at the meat counter is a more economical buy than the pork chops down the aisle. A recent USDA study may help them answer such questions.

According to the report, ground beef, beef liver, whole chicken, turkey, and ground chuck were found to be the best meat buys—in terms of how much protein shoppers get for their dollar. As one might expect, the economy of a cut depends on the amount of cooked lean meat or the number of servings it contains, as well as the price per pound. Costs in the study—which also cover meat alternates—were estimated using nationwide prices collected in June 1987 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

Relatively high-priced meat cuts with little or no waste may be more economical than low-priced cuts with a lot of bone, gristle, or fat. For example, a pork loin roast with the bone costs \$1.95 per pound, while a boneless beef round roast costs \$2.56 per pound (*table 1*). However, it only takes 30 percent of the beef roast per pound to get 3 ounces of cooked lean meat. The proportion is higher—41 percent—for the pork roast. Multiplying these figures by the prices,



Eggs can be better protein buys than some meats.

Table 1. Finding Good Meat Buys

Meat	Retail Price Per pound ¹	Raw portion equals 3 oz. of cooked, lean meat	
		Dollars	Pound
Beef liver	1.03	0.27	0.28
Ground beef	1.30	0.29	0.38
Whole chicken ²	0.77	0.55	0.42
Turkey ²	1.05	0.41	0.43
Ground chuck	1.71	0.28	0.48
Smoked ham ³	1.50	0.38	0.57
Canned ham	2.76	0.25	0.69
Chicken breasts ³	1.81	0.40	0.72
Beef chuck roast ³	1.71	0.44	0.75
Beef round roast ⁴	2.56	0.30	0.77
Pork loin roast ³	1.95	0.41	0.80
Beef round steak ⁴	2.96	0.32	0.95
Center cut pork chops ³	2.97	0.42	1.25
Beef sirloin steak ³	3.44	0.38	1.31
Beef rib roast ³	3.64	0.43	1.57

¹U.S. average retail price, estimated using data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. ²Ready to cook. ³Includes bone. ⁴Boneless.

the lean meat in the beef costs less than the pork. Three ounces of lean beef cost 77 cents, while a comparable amount of the pork costs 80 cents.

The study also compared the costs of 20 grams of protein—about one-third the recommended daily allowance for a 20-year-old man—for various meats and alternates. The results show that peanut butter and eggs are as good or better protein buys than less expensive cuts of meat. Milk is also an economical source of good-quality protein, although it rarely replaces meat in meals.

Bread and other grain products, like pasta and rice, also contribute protein to our diets. They are frequently used with a small amount of meat, poultry, fish, or cheese. In this way, the high-quality protein enhances the lower quality available from the cereal products.

In addition, some processed meats—such as frankfurters and bologna—were more expensive sources of protein than pork and beef roasts. For example, 1 pound of bologna costs \$2.15 (*table 2*). Thirty-eight percent of a pound is needed to get 20 grams of protein. At this price and proportion, 20 grams of protein from

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Table 2. Protein Costs Vary by Product

Item	Market unit	Price per market unit ¹	Portion equal to 20 grams of protein ²	Cost of 20 grams of protein
		<i>Dollars</i>		<i>Dollars</i>
Large eggs	dozen	0.71	0.28	0.20
Beef liver	pound	1.03	0.25	0.26
Enriched white bread	pound	0.53	0.50	0.26
Peanut butter	18 oz.	2.05	0.14	0.29
Whole chicken ³	pound	0.77	0.42	0.32
Canned tuna	6.5 oz.	0.78	0.42	0.33
Ground beef	pound	1.30	0.27	0.35
Turkey ³	pound	1.05	0.33	0.35
Fluid whole milk	1/2 gal.	1.13	0.31	0.35
Ground chuck	pound	1.71	0.25	0.43
Chicken breast ⁴	pound	1.81	0.27	0.49
Beef chuck roast ⁴	pound	1.71	0.29	0.50
Smoked ham ⁴	pound	1.50	0.33	0.50
Processed American cheese	pound	2.69	0.20	0.54
Cheddar cheese	pound	3.05	0.18	0.55
Beef round roast ⁵	pound	2.56	0.23	0.59
Beef round steak ⁵	pound	2.96	0.22	0.65
Pork loin roast ⁴	pound	1.95	0.35	0.68
Canned ham	pound	2.76	0.26	0.72
All meat frankfurters	pound	2.00	0.39	0.78
Bologna	pound	2.15	0.38	0.82
Beef sirloin steak ⁴	pound	3.44	0.26	0.89
Pork sausage	pound	1.94	0.47	0.91
Center cut pork chops ⁴	pound	2.97	0.32	0.95
Sliced bacon	pound	2.13	0.52	1.11
Beef rib roast ⁴	pound	3.64	0.32	1.16

¹U.S. average retail price, estimated using data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. ²About one-third of the daily amount recommended for a 20-year-old man. Assumes that all meat is eaten. ³Ready to cook. ⁴Includes bone. ⁵Boneless.

bologna cost 82 cents. Even though canned ham, at \$2.76 a pound, seems more expensive, 20 grams of ham protein is 10 cents cheaper than that from bologna. Similarly, 1 pound of beef round steak costs \$2.96. However, only 22 percent of a pound is needed to get 20 grams of protein. Therefore, the cost of 20 grams of protein from the round steak is 65 cents, 17 cents less than bologna.

The study also showed that while a 3-ounce serving of lean meat, poultry, or fish provides 20 or more grams of protein, the amount of some alternates and meat products required to provide 20 grams of protein is well over the amount people normally eat in a day. For example, it takes 4-1/2 tablespoons of peanut butter, 4 frankfurters, or 10 slices of bacon to provide 20 grams of protein.

The numbers in tables 1 and 2 can help consumers obtain comparable costs of meats and alternates in their supermarkets. Simply substitute local prices for the national ones in the table, then multiply the part of the market unit figure by the local price to get the cost of the protein. []

References

Meat and Meat Alternates Study, USDA Press Release 977-87, August 14, 1987.