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Convenience Food Cost Update

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Changing lifestyles have helped to popularize commercially prepared "convenience" foods.

A study was published recently that provides a comparative analysis of the cost, yield, and eating quality of these convenience foods with home-prepared foods.¹ Food-cost data for the study were based on prices collected from July 1974 through June 1975 in four cities: Milwaukee, Philadelphia, San Francisco-Oakland, and New Orleans. These data have been updated using food price indices in the Consumer Price Index for 1974-75 and 1978-79.

The updated food cost data show that of the 166 convenience foods considered, 59 percent cost more per serving than ingredients for their fresh or home-prepared counterparts, 28 percent cost less, and 13 percent cost about the same. Of the 82 frozen, chilled, or ready-to-serve convenience foods with a fresh or home-prepared counterpart, only 13 (16 percent) were less expensive than their counterpart. Most of these were in the food categories of fruits and vegetables.

Three-fifths of the 23 canned fruit and vegetable products cost less than their counterparts made from fresh fruits and vegetables. However, when fresh asparagus, grapefruit, peaches, and strawberries were in season, they cost less than their canned form. Almost all of the frozen multiple-ingredient vegetable convenience foods were more expensive than their home-prepared counterpart. Most of the frozen single-ingredient vegetable convenience foods were either less expensive or cost the same as their home-prepared counterpart.

More than 80 percent of the baked goods and desserts made from a complete or incomplete mix cost less than, or the same as, their counterpart prepared from a recipe. Of the beef, pork, poultry, fish, and shellfish convenience foods that cost more than their home-prepared versions, two-thirds cost over

15 cents more per serving. Of the baked goods and dessert convenience foods that were more expensive than their home counterpart, nearly three-fourths cost under 10 cents more. Of the convenience foods that were less expensive than their counterpart, almost half cost fewer than 5 cents less per serving. ■

Cost Per Serving of Ingredients for Home-prepared and Convenience Foods, July 1978 — June 1979 (4-city average)

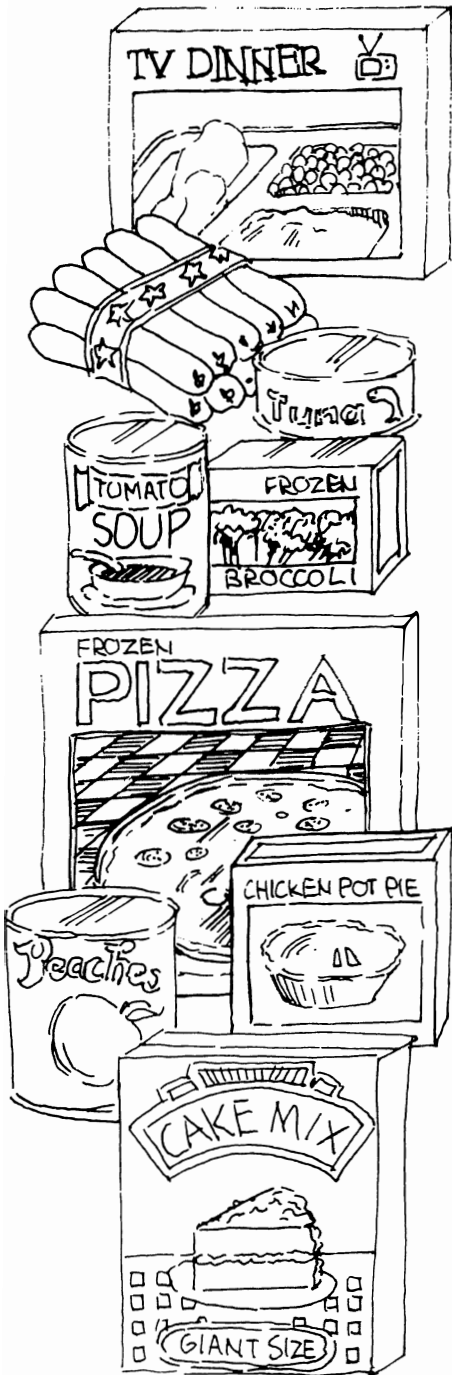
Product	Serving Size Oz.	Home-Prepared		Convenience forms	
Beef					
Chili-macaroni	9.2	40.8*	41.1 ^{1,2}		
Dinner	11.3	75.8	102.7 ³		
Lasagna	9.8	57.7*	112.6 ^{2,3}		
Lasagna, skillet	8.7	42.9*	36.6 ^{1,2}		
Patties, all beef	2.7	31.1	56.2 ³		
Patties, soy-beef	2.7	24.3 ⁴	22.3 ^{2,5}		
Pie	7.4	26.2*	46.4 ³		
Sloppy Joe sauce	2.8	14.3*	20.8 ^{2,6}		
Stew	8.6	37.0*	42.3 ⁶		
Stroganoff, skillet	8.0	51.6*	63.6 ^{1,2}		
Meat loaf dinner	9.1	37.1	91.4 ³		
Pork					
Ham, cured	2.0	—	41.6 ⁷	42.3 ⁶	
Sweet-sour pork	6.0	40.9*	67.8 ^{2,3}	75.2 ^{1,2*}	
Sausage	2.0	40.8 ⁸	42.9 ⁹		
Chicken					
A la king	5.7	27.8*	47.4 ^{2,3}		
Braised, whole	2.0	23.6	32.3 ⁶		
Chow mein	6.6	37.5*	38.4 ⁶	66.9 ³	
Fried, flour-coated	2.0 ¹⁰	27.4 ¹¹	30.1 ¹²		
Fried, batter-dipped	2.0 ¹⁰	28.9	51.3 ³		
Fried, dinner	9.3	40.8	81.7 ³		
Meat	1.5	18.2	46.3 ⁶		
Pie	7.8	36.8*	46.4 ³		
Salad, spread	2.5	23.0*	46.4 ^{2,6}		
Turkey					
Dinner	12.5	46.5	92.9 ³		
Tetrazzini	8.1	50.2*	102.4 ^{2,3}		
Finfish					
Pollack fish sticks	2.6	35.3*	35.5 ³		
Haddock dinner	11.2	88.0	129.9 ³		
Tuna casserole	7.8	30.3*	87.6 ^{2,3}	29.4 ^{1,2*}	

¹ Larry G. Traub and Dianne D. Odland. Convenience Foods and Home-Prepared Foods: Comparative Costs, Yield, and Quality, AER 429, August 1979.

Continued on next page.

Cost Per Serving of Ingredients — Continued

Product	Serving Size Oz.	Home-Prepared	Convenience forms Cents	
Shellfish				
Crabcakes	2.8	80.3*	53.8 ³	
Crab, deviled	3.1	45.6*	62.6 ³	
Crabmeat	1.8	94.3 ¹³	98.3 ⁶	
Shrimp, cooked	2.1	111.5	69.4 ⁶	79.6 ¹⁴
Shrimp, fried	2.6	64.5*	110.4 ¹⁴	73.1 ¹⁵
			69.9 ¹⁶	52.2 ¹⁷
Shrimp, newburg	4.2	99.7*	146.0 ²³	
Shrimp, creole	7.5	83.7*	73.9 ³	
Pizza/rice/spaghetti				
Pizza	8.3	37.8*	73.2 ¹⁸	47.4 ¹ 80.6 ³
			161.9 ²¹⁹	
Rice, cooked	3.4	2.8	4.2 ²⁰	4.8 ²¹
Fried rice	2.8	17.1*	31.8 ²³	
Spanish rice	4.5	11.5	15.3 ⁶	13.4 ¹
Spaghetti/tom. sauce	8.9	26.2	19.2 ⁶	20.3 ¹
Vegetables				
Asparagus	2.1	34.5	28.9 ³	21.9 ⁶
Beets	3.2	18.9	10.1 ²²	8.4 ²³
Broccoli spears	3.3	20.0	22.8 ³	31.4 ²⁴
Broccoli au gratin	5.1	35.5*	51.6 ²³	
Broccoli/hollandaise	4.0	24.0*	36.1 ²³	
Brussels sprouts	2.7	20.5	16.8 ³	
Butter beans	3.3 ²⁵	4.6	12.6 ⁶	
Carrots	2.8	10.1	11.0 ²⁶	8.0 ²⁷
Corn, cut	2.9	16.6	15.8 ³	11.7 ⁶
Corn-on-the-cob	6.1	19.9	19.0 ³	
Green beans, cut	2.3	12.1	12.3 ³	11.3 ²⁸ 9.7 ⁶
Green bean casserole	4.3	27.5	35.7 ²³	
Green peas	2.8	41.1	15.7 ³	12.5 ⁶
Hawaiian-style	3.8	18.6	29.2 ²³	
Lima beans	2.9	43.9	16.0 ³	16.2 ⁶
Pork and beans	6.9	8.0*	17.5 ⁶	
Potatoes: au gratin	4.5	10.7	35.8 ²³	13.5 ²⁹
boiled	4.0	4.1	14.3 ⁶	
french fried	2.0	11.5	9.8 ³	
hash-browned	3.9	5.8	13.5 ²⁹	
mashed	3.5	4.5	5.5 ²⁹	
patties	3.1	4.9	15.9 ³	
puffs	2.5	9.2	9.8 ³	
scalloped	4.3	6.1	12.1 ²⁹	
stuffed	5.6	14.1	31.1 ²³	
Spinach	3.4	37.2	16.0 ³	14.7 ⁶
Fruits				
Cherries, red sour	3.9 ²⁵	32.5	26.4 ⁶	
Coconut, shredded3	1.9	4.0 ³⁰	
Cranb. sauce, strained	2.4	6.3	7.2 ⁶	
Cranb. sauce, whole	2.4	4.8	7.1 ⁶	
Grapefruit, sections	3.4 ²⁵	18.9	17.2 ⁶	
Lemon juice	1.1	12.3	7.6 ³¹	3.5 ³²
Orange juice	4.4	25.1	9.4 ³²	8.9 ⁶ 6.0 ³³
Orange drink	4.4		6.0 ²³³	5.2 ²³⁴
Peaches	3.7 ²⁵	22.3	21.3 ³⁵	29.4 ²³⁶ 36.5 ³⁷
Pineapple chunks	3.2 ²⁵	17.8	15.3 ⁶	
Raspberries, red	2.6 ²⁵	35.5	44.0 ⁶	48.0 ³
Strawberries, sweetened	3.5 ²⁵	30.4	54.3 ⁶	46.2 ³⁸ 44.7 ²³⁹
			46.0 ⁴⁰	28.5 ⁴¹



Cost Per Serving of Ingredients — Continued

Product	Serving Size Oz.	Home-Prepared	Convenience forms		
			Cents		
Dairy/eggs					
Amer. process cheese	2.0	23.2 ⁴² 43	23.6 ⁴⁴	23.5 ² 45	
Amer. cheese food	2.0	16.7 ⁴² 43	53.3 ² 46		
Cheese fondue	2.7	38.3	47.0 ² 18		
Butter	.3	3.2 ⁸ 42	3.3 ⁴⁷		
Margarine	.3	1.4 ⁴² 47	1.7 ² 48	1.7 ² 49	
Milk, nonfat	8.5	11.3 ⁴²	7.5 ² 50		
Whipped cream	1.0	8.1	10.6 ⁴⁶		
Eggs, scrambled	4.1	14.8	28.6 ² 51		
Baked goods/desserts					
Biscuits	1.4	2.9	3.0 ⁵²	5.2 ¹⁸	
Bread stuffing	2.1	9.1	7.0 ² 53		
Brownies	.7	5.2	3.7 ⁵³	3.7 ⁵²	8.2 ³
			8.3 ⁵⁴		
Cake: angel food	1.7	6.3	7.6 ⁵²	15.5 ⁵⁴	
bundt, fudge	4.1	15.0	14.6 ² 53		
devil's food	1.7	8.1	5.0 ⁵³	17.2 ³	15.0 ⁵⁴
pound	1.1	3.9	3.9 ⁵³	14.2 ³	9.5 ⁵⁴
yellow	1.2	4.4	3.9 ⁵³	11.0 ⁵⁴	
Cookies, sugar	.5	1.8	3.5 ⁵⁵	3.8 ⁵⁴	
Frosting: chocolate	1.1	6.1	6.3 ⁵³		
white, fluffy	.6	1.6	3.3 ⁵²		
Muffins, corn	1.5	3.9	3.9 ⁵³		
Pancakes	5.3	11.7	13.7 ⁵³	6.8 ⁵²	45.0 ³
Pie: apple	4.7	16.4	26.9 ³	31.5 ⁵⁴	
cherry	4.5	22.4	19.5 ⁵²	28.9 ³	31.4 ⁵⁴
coconut cream	5.0	14.8	23.2 ⁵³	27.6 ³	35.0 ⁵⁴
Pudding, chocolate	4.6	13.2	12.9 ⁵² 56	12.1 ⁵⁰ 52	23.9 ² 36
Sherbet, orange	3.2	6.2	13.4 ⁵⁴		
Waffles	3.3	7.0	7.8 ⁵³	3.6 ⁵²	24.2 ³
Yeast rolls	1.3	2.4	3.2 ⁵²	6.5 ³	8.1 ⁵⁷
			7.1 ⁵⁸		
Soup					
Split pea with ham	8.5	—	13.4 ⁵⁹	33.9 ² 60	50.5 ² 63
			19.4 ² 61		
Baby foods					
Beef liver	3.3	29.2	40.7 ⁶		
Peaches	2.8	28.0 ⁶²	12.7 ⁶		
Peas	3.7	29.7 ⁶³	17.6 ⁶		
Coffee	6.0 ⁶⁴	5.2 ⁶⁵	3.2 ⁶⁶	3.2 ² 67	
Tea	6.0 ⁶⁴	1.0 ⁶⁸	2.1 ⁶⁹	1.6 ²¹	1.5 ² 70
			15.0 ² 71		

*Most costly ingredient was held in the same proportion to the sum of all ingredients as in the convenience form that had the least quantity of the most costly ingredient.

1. Mix. 2. "New generation" convenience food (introduced after 1960). 3. Frozen. 4. Soy protein added to ground beef at home. 5. Soy protein added to ground beef at store. 6. Canned. 7. Fully cooked. 8. Bulk. 9. Link. 10. Based on lean meat content. 11. Whole chicken. 12. Cut up chicken. 13. Fresh, cooked, chilled. 14. Prepared from frozen, raw, peeled, deveined shrimp. 15. Prepared from frozen, raw, breaded shrimp. 16. Frozen, breaded, prefried. 17. Frozen, minced, extruded, breaded, prefried. 18. Chilled. 19. Frozen appetizer. 20. Converted. 21. Instant. 22. Canned, diced, plain. 23. Canned, diced, Harvard. 24. Frozen with butter sauce. 25. Drained solids. 26. Canned, sliced. 27. Canned, diced. 28. Frozen, bulk bag. 29. Dehydrated. 30. Plastic bag. 31. In plastic container. 32. Bottled.

33. Frozen concentrate. 34. Crystals. 35. Canned halves, heavy syrup. 36. Canned, individual serving container. 37. Frozen slices. 38. Frozen slices in carton. 39. Frozen slices in thaw and serve pouch. 40. Frozen whole, in tub. 41. Frozen whole, bulk bag. 42. Ingredient food (processed food item not commonly prepared in home). 43. Loaf. 44. Sliced. 45. Singles. 46. Aerosol can. 47. Quartered. 48. Soft, tub. 49. Liquid, squeeze bottle. 50. Dry instant. 51. Frozen cholesterol-free substitute. 52. Complete mix (requires only milk or water, sometimes flavoring). 53. Incomplete mix (requires eggs, butter or margarine, or other ingredients in addition to milk or water). 54. Ready-to-serve. 55. Chilled in roll. 56. Cooked. 57. Brown-and-serve. 58. Heat-and-serve. 59. Canned, condensed. 60. Canned, single-strength. 61. Dried, individual serving packet (green pea). 62. Prepared from fresh peaches. 63. Prepared from fresh peas. 64. Fluid ounces. 65. Regular grind. 66. Instant, granules. 67. Instant, freeze-dried. 68. Leaves. 69. Bags. 70. Instant, lemon-flavored. 71. Ready-to-drink, lemon-flavored, canned.

