DOES RACE INFLUENCE FOOD PURCHASING?

Anthony E. Gallo,
Larry E. Salathe,
and William T. Boehm
(202) 447-8707

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index (CPI) is the most widely used measure of price changes in the economy. To develop this index, prices are collected on a variety of products, summarized, and weighted by their relative importance. The weights reflect the purchasing patterns of a typical urban American household. Since the weights represent mean expenditure patterns they may not be representative of the purchasing patterns of various socioeconomic and demographic groups within the U.S. population, and as a result movements in the overall CPI may not provide meaningful indications of changes in the cost of living for these groups.

The last two issues of the *National Food Review* contained articles analyzing the impact of income and age on food spending. This article examines food purchasing patterns by race of family head. The specific questions addressed are:

- Does race really make a difference in food buying patterns?
- Does race have an impact on the allocation of the food-at-home dollar?
- What is the relationship of race, food spending, and income?
- Are there differences in actual per capita weekly food spending by each racial group?
- What portion of the total food expenditure is accounted for by each racial group, relative to their portion of the total population?

Whether race impacts on food expenditures is especially significant to the South (as defined by the Census Bureau) and to a lesser degree, the West. In terms of racial composition, these regions are the least homogeneous. Black Americans comprise about 11 percent of the U.S. population, but nearly four out of every seven reside in the South. About one out of every five southern Americans are Black, compared with only one out of about 20 in the Northeast and north-central region.

As defined by the Census Bureau, "other" Americans include native Americans and Orientals. This grouping is extremely diverse. Japanese Americans for instance have the highest per capita income of any socioeconomic group in the country, while native Americans have the lowest income. As a result, interpretations of income and consumption behavior of the "other" group takes on far less significance than those of Black and White groupings. This "other" group, about 1½ percent of the population, is largely located in the West. Although small in relation to the total population, about four out of every seven people in

RACIAL DISPERSION BY REGION IN THE U.S., 1975

	Northeast	North Central	South	West	Total
White and other than Blacks	91	92	81	94	89
Black	9	8	19	6	11

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.: 1977*. (98th edition.), Washington, D.C., 1977.

ALLOCATION OF THE FOOD-AT-HOME DOLLAR, BY RACE AND INCOME

Item	Under $5,000		$5,000–$8,000		$8,000–$12,000		$12,000–$15,000		$15,000–$20,000		Over $20,000	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Meat, poultry	36.69	47.50	36.77	47.77	37.13	47.39	36.33	46.56	40.12	50.74	40.1	53.28
Fish and eggs												
Meats	25.76	31.50	26.86	31.56	27.52	32.81	26.97	30.44	31.3	38.57	30.12	39.58
Pork	8.28	14.27	8.79	14.39	8.12	14.03	8.19	11.56	7.80	13.02	8.53	15.58
Other meats	4.37	4.99	4.39	4.91	4.86	5.35	5.00	4.76	4.70	4.11	4.37	4.57
Poultry	5.15	8.47	4.55	8.35	4.49	7.95	4.26	8.24	4.07	6.19	4.45	7.22
Fish	2.51	3.82	2.49	4.28	2.43	3.17	2.58	4.76	2.42	3.29	3.16	4.09
Eggs	3.25	3.66	2.89	3.56	2.63	3.44	2.51	2.80	2.24	2.70	2.26	2.41
Dairy products	14.28	10.46	13.96	10.69	14.29	10.77	14.48	10.95	14.23	10.12	13.60	8.19
Cereal and Bakery	12.68	11.49	12.51	11.18	12.29	11.06	12.37	10.51	11.54	9.63	11.4	10.16
Fruits and vegetables	15.42	13.22	14.69	14.05	13.81	13.92	13.99	13.99	12.99	12.12	14.68	11.96
Sugar and sweets	3.09	2.37	30.56	2.41	3.03	2.10	3.23	23.1	2.94	1.92	2.79	2.09
Fats and oils	3.46	2.96	31.09	2.78	2.99	2.71	2.98	2.63	2.92	2.09	2.66	2.86
Nonalcoholic beverages	7.40	6.27	7.47	6.07	7.79	6.47	7.53	7.34	7.04	6.82	6.56	5.86
Prepared foods	7.05	5.75	8.48	5.07	8.65	5.60	9.13	5.73	8.17	6.59	8.00	5.61

Source: CES Tapes.

this category are in the West. Nearly one out of every 25 Westerners falls in this category, compared with about 1 percent or less in the other three regions.

Food Spending and Income by Race

The 1972-73 Consumer Expenditure Survey indicates that, on the average, Black families are larger and have lower incomes than White families. Black families averaged 3.1 persons compared with 2.8 persons for White families. Income before taxes averaged about $6,600 for Black families, against nearly $9,800 for Whites. A total of 46.3 percent of the Black families had before-tax incomes under $5,000, while 26.0 percent of White families had less than $5,000. Of the White families, 11.5 percent had incomes before taxes over $20,000, compared with 4.2 percent of the Black families.

Reflecting, in part, their lower average income, Black families spent a larger share of their income on food than White families, an average of $27.22 per week or about 21.4 percent of their income. White families on the other hand, spent an average of $32.93 per week or 17.5 percent of their income on food.

On a per capita basis, food expenditures by Whites averaged $11.76 per week compared with $8.78 for Blacks. More than half of that $3 weekly differential was for food eaten away from home. Per capita weekly expenditures for food eaten away from home averged $1.61 for Blacks compared with $3.26 for Whites. Whites spent an average of 12.5 percent of their income for food at home, while Blacks averaged about 17.5 percent.

On the average, white families allocated about 72 percent of their food budget to food at home. In addition, race appears to affect the allocation of the food-at-home dollar. Black families spent, on the average, about 47 cents of their food-at-home dollar on meat, poultry, fish, and eggs compared with 38 cents for White families. Blacks spent an average of $3.07 per week on pork, while White families spent an average of $1.97 per week. Blacks also spent more and a larger percentage of their food-at-home dollar on poultry and fish than did Whites. Offsetting these large purchases were lower expenditures by Black families for dairy products, cereal and bakery products, sugar and other

sweets, nonalcoholic beverages, and miscellaneous prepared foods. Black families spent on the average 30.1, 17.5, 32.9, 15.3, and 31.1 percent less, respectively, on dairy products, cereal and bakery products, sugar and sweets, nonalcoholic beverages, and miscellaneous prepared foods.

Does Race Account for These Differences?

These differences in food expenditure patterns by race may reflect differences in income, family size, location of residence, and other factors, and thus may not reflect only the impact of race. In order to isolate the net impact of race on household food purchases, statistical techniques were applied to data collected in the 1972-73 Consumer Expenditure Survey. The results of the statistical analyses indicate that race (by itself) does not affect household purchases of beef, fresh fruits, fresh and processed vegetables or total food-at-home.

However, there were some statistically significant differences within the food-at-home category. White families were found to spend about 19, 38, 5, 9, and 12 cents more per person per week on cereal and bakery products, processed fruits, sugar and other sweets, and nonalcoholic beverages respectively, than their Black counterparts. Whitefamilies were also found to spend 6, 23, and 64 cents more per person per week on fats and oils, miscellaneous prepared foods, and food-away-from-home, respectively, than Black families. White families, though, spent less per person on pork, poultry, fish and other seafoods, and eggs than their Black counterparts. The estimated differences were 44, 29, 14, and 5 cents per person per week on pork, poultry, fish and seafoods, and eggs, respectively.

ALLOCATION OF FOOD AT-HOME DOLLAR BY RACE OF FAMILY HEAD

Item	White	Black	Other
	Percent		
Cereal and Bakery Products	12.1	10.7	11.9
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs	37.8	47.2	41.5
Meats	28.5	32.3	27.3
Beef	15.7	13.4	14.3
Pork	8.3	13.8	9.3
Other	4.7	5.1	3.6
Poultry	4.2	7.7	5.6
Fish and Seafood	2.6	4.1	5.7
Eggs	2.4	3.0	2.8
Dairy Products	14.1	10.6	10.5
Fruits and Vegetables	14.5	14.0	16.2
Fresh Fruits	3.8	3.5	5.0
Fresh Vegetables	4.4	4.4	5.5
Processed Fruits	3.0	2.4	2.8
Processed Vegetables	3.3	3.6	2.8
Sugar and Other Sweets	3.1	2.2	2.1
Fats and Oils	2.8	2.5	2.9
Nonalcoholic Beverages	7.4	6.7	6.1
Miscellaneous Prepared Foods, Condiments and Seasonings	8.2	6.1	8.8

Source: CES: Diary Survey, July 1972–June 1974.

Proportion of Food Expenditures, Income, and Population

The results suggest that race may have a significant influence on the food market. The food expenditures by Whites are much greater than their percentage of the population, but somewhat lower than their share of total income. In addition, the share of away-from-home food purchases accounted for by Whites exceeds both their portion of the population and their share of income.

Blacks comprise about 11 percent of the population but account for only 7 percent of total income. However, they account for about 8½ percent of total food expenditures. Blacks account for approximately 9½ percent of food-at-home purchases, and for 5.7 percent of food-away-from-home purchases.

In terms of individual food purchases, race appears to have an even more important influence. Blacks accounted for over 16½ percent of pork expenditures, about 10 percent of poultry expenditures, and 15½ percent of all expenditures on fish. Expenditures by Blacks for dairy products, cereal and bakery products,

and processed foods were much lower relative to their share of the population.

Implications for the Future

Census projections into the next century suggest that the racial composition of the U.S. population will change. This change is expected to occur because of historical differences in the birth rate between racial groups. By the year 2000, the Black population is projected to increase by about 43 percent, compared with 27 percent for Whites. However, the population in the "other" grouping will rise almost 150 percent, due to the relatively young age of Japanese Americans and high birth rates among native Americans. If these projections hold true, Whites will comprise about 84.1 percent, and Blacks will make up 12.5 percent of the population in the year 2000. Currently, Whites make up about 86.5 percent, and Blacks make about 11.4 percent of the population.

These population trends will exert a positive influence on per capita pork, poultry, fish, and egg consumption, but exert a negative influence on per capita consumption of cereal and bakery products, dairy products, sugar and other sweets, nonalcoholic beverages, and fats and oils.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCOME, POPULATION AND FOOD EXPENDITURES BY RACE

Race of Family Head	Population	Money earned before taxes	Total food expenditures	Total food at home	Total food away from home
	Percent				
White	87.6	91.9	90.3	89.3	93.2
Black	11.1	7.0	8.4	9.4	5.7
Other	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Consumer Expenditure Survey, Diary Survey, July 1972–June 1974.

ALLOCATION OF FOOD DOLLAR BETWEEN FOOD AT HOME AND FOOD AWAY FROM HOME BY RACE OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD

Race	Food at Home		Food Away from Home		Total Food
	Amount/ Week	Percent	Amount/ Week	Percent	Amount/ Week
White	$23.81	72.3	$9.13	7.7	$32.93
Black	22.23	81.7	4.99	18.3	27.22
Other	26.56	76.3	8.23	23.7	26.56
All families	23.68	73.1	8.70	26.9	32.38

Source: Consumer Expenditure Survey: Diary Survey, July 1972–June 1974.

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