

## Creative Tips to Reduce Family Food Costs



If you are feeling the pinch of rising grocery prices you are not alone. According to the Farm Bureau, in an article from *The Voice of Agriculture*, the price of retail food items decreased slightly in the fourth quarter of 2008 from what they were in the third quarter; however, they acknowledge that the prices were still 7 percent higher than they were in the first quarter of 2008. The article goes on to say that “despite the recent collapse in oil prices and steep declines in farm commodity prices, food prices have not yet declined significantly and may not for quite some time.” For many families struggling to pay their mortgages, utilities and other monthly bills, this is one area that they can control how much is spent.

How much is enough to spend on the family food budget? It is sometimes hard to judge how much is enough and how much is too much to spend on a monthly grocery bill. According to the USDA’s Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, based on November 2008 data, the current figure (using the Thrifty Plan) for spending for groceries per week for a family of four is \$121.40 (that is \$525.80 a month). This should give one a starting point as to where to set your budget.



When you budget your food bill each month remember to include eating out. By eliminating or reducing the amount of eating out or take-out that your family consumes each week you will significantly save on your overall budget. Remember that rising food costs affect everyone and restaurants also have to pass on these higher costs in the form of raising prices. You will save \$140.00 a month just by taking your lunch instead of paying \$7.00 a day at a restaurant.

### **Some other tips that will help your family:**

- \$ Reduce your use of prepackaged convenience food as you are paying a higher price for the packaging and the convenience. You can save a great deal by making it yourself.
- \$ Prepare your own mixes and keep them on hand to increase the speed of meal preparation. You will save on buying them pre-mixed and it does not require much time and effort.
- \$ For those of us who are too busy to get in the kitchen for long amounts of time dust off those slow cookers! You can start your meal prior to going to work and when you come home it is ready to eat and your house will smell warm and inviting too! There are great recipes for slow cookers. One quick tip is to spray your crock with vegetable oil spray to keep meals from sticking and make clean up a snap.
- \$ Remember to plan ahead! Spend some time and think of it as a savings investment by looking at sales ads, clipping coupons and taking inventory of what you need. Make a menu so that you know what you really need to have on hand. If you don't like holding up the line trying to find your coupons, try this tip: As you shop, take the coupons out of an envelope as you use them and place them in your pocket or another envelope. That way at the end of your shopping you will have all the used coupons separated from those you did not use and will not have to go through them all at the register.
- \$ Go meatless one or two nights a week. Meat prices are often the highest per unit item in the grocery store depending on the type and cut. Instead, try beans and rice, soups or vegetable chowders, vegetable stir fry or pastas with sautéed vegetables and sauces.
- \$ For an inexpensive protein source try eggs. Egg dishes are great for dinner.
- \$ Learn to reuse those leftovers! Recycle your leftovers into other dishes. This is a cost effective way to save food, time and money!
- \$ If you find you don't have a lot of time to cook make two of every entrée and freeze one for another day. Remember to write the date of preparation on the container that will be frozen so that you know how long it has been in the freezer.



Remember small changes add up to big savings. Start with setting your budget based on what you can afford and then try one tip at a time until you find the ones that best suit you and your family's needs and preferences.

The following is a basic homemade baking mix to have on hand for the sheer convenience of saving you time in the kitchen. It has many uses, including being the base for making biscuits, pancakes, waffles, dumplings and recipes calling for biscuit or baking mix:

### **Basic All-Purpose Baking Mix**

6 cups all purpose flour      3 tablespoons baking powder      1 tablespoon salt  
1 ¼ cup vegetable shortening (butter-flavored *or* plain)

1. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.
2. Cut in shortening with pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse corn meal. Store in a container with a tight-fitting lid. Will keep for up to two months. Makes about 2 quarts.

For Biscuits: Stir together 2 ¼ cups baking mix with 2/3 cup milk. Knead 10 times on lightly floured surface, roll out and cut into biscuits or skip the kneading and simply drop dough onto an ungreased baking sheet. Bake at 425°F for 10 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned. Makes about 10 biscuits.



For Pancakes: Stir together 2 cups baking mix, 1 cup milk and 2 eggs until blended. Do not over-mix. Ladle ¼ cupfuls onto hot greased griddle or skillet and cook until edges are dry and top is bubbly, turn over and cook until golden brown. Makes about 14 pancakes.



For Waffles: Stir together 2 cups baking mix, 1 1/3 cups milk, 1 egg and 2 tablespoons vegetable oil until blended. Pour batter into center of hot greased waffle iron and cook for 5 minutes or until steaming stops. Makes about 12 (4-inch) waffles.



For Dumplings: Stir together 2 cups baking mix and 2/3 cup milk just until soft dough forms. Drop by spoonfuls into boiling liquid, cover and cook for 10 minutes without lifting the lid. Makes about 10 dumplings.



**Tip:** For Buttermilk Baking Mix, add 9 tablespoons dry buttermilk powder to the basic mix.



"Economical use of your time and money = thrift."

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