Ways to save on groceries during the pandemic

Sources: Nichole Huff, assistant extension professor and Kelly May, senior extension associate, family finance and resource management

You probably have noticed that you are paying a little more for food these days. The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting supply chain disruptions have caused consumers to pay more for their normal grocery items, especially meats. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts that we will see our highest grocery price increase since 2011 as overall grocery prices are expected to rise by an average of 3% in 2020.

This increase is coming at a time when many Kentuckians find themselves financially strapped, as some have lost jobs or have had their hours reduced because of the pandemic. Here are some ways you can stretch your food dollars.

* Use online shopping for budgeting. Due to the pandemic, many grocery stores are offering online shopping with no or reduced pickup fees, so it’s a great time to try purchasing your food online. Not only does shopping online keep you out of the store, but you can use it to closely monitor your spending, cost compare like items and avoid impulse purchases. Some grocery chains also offer additional coupons or incentives for consumers who use their pickup or delivery service. You can use a free grocery store app or website to create a shopping list, meal plan, comparison shop, clip coupons and view local deals.
* Plan ahead. With your family, design a menu for the week so you will know exactly what items you need. Check your pantry for the ingredients you already have. Check local grocery store ads for sales on items that you frequently use. Whether you shop online or in-person, create a shopping list and stick to it. Eat before going in the store. Shopping hungry can result in more impulse buys.
* Buy store brands or generic. Often, these items will be significantly cheaper than the name brand item.
* Look for savings. Many times, grocery stores will put their most expensive items at eye level. Look on higher or lower shelves for deeper discounts.
* Reach for the back. Stores will stock their shelves with the oldest items up front. When shopping for perishable items, grab the ones in the back as they tend to be newer and will last longer.
* Shop the farmers market. Not only are you helping support local producers but many times, prices on seasonal and organic produce will be lower at your local farmers market than in the grocery store. This is because local growers have lower transportation costs to get their food to consumers compared to those that serve the big-box stores. You can find your nearest market online at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets> . Plate It Up Kentucky Proud has many recipes that will help you get the most use from your in-season produce purchases. Those recipes are available online at <https://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/plate-it-kentucky-proud> or on Facebook @plateitupKYproud.

More information on how to stretch your food dollars is available at the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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