



CONTACT: Crystelle Fogle, MBA, RD 406-947-2344

MT Department of Public Health & Human Services

February 1, 2009

Eco-Nomical Solutions: Save Money, Stay Healthy, Reduce Waste

There is no doubt that Montanans are facing some tough economic decisions. Just talk to one of the legislators meeting in Helena this month! Whether you are a lawmaker working on a balanced state budget or a family trying to trim your weekly expenses, our current economy has just about everyone looking for ways to spend less. In terms of nutrition and health, experts are worried that the economic recession could make a bad situation worse for Big Sky families.

“Even before food costs started to climb and people began losing jobs, we were talking about a nutrition recession,” says Lynn Paul, EdD, RD (registered dietitian), and Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist at MSU in Bozeman. “Americans already consume too many calories and too few nutrients. In an economic crunch, they may choose more cheap foods that are high in fat, sugar, and calories. Fast food ‘value meals’ are a terrible nutritional value for your food dollar.”

As frugal shoppers have known for years, it is possible to minimize food costs while maximizing nutrition. It just takes attention, time, and, most of all, planning. Many resources for eating well on a budget are available, including *Eating Right When Money Is Tight* (www.fns.usda.gov/FSP/outreach/pdfs/making-ends-meet.pdf) from USDA.

According to Dr. Paul, the MSU nutrition education team can provide lots of practical resources as well. “Our family and consumer science specialists and county agents are real experts at putting healthy food on the table at a reasonable cost. We offer classes for low-income families, children, and seniors, as well as recipes and tips available to everyone on our web site at www.montana.edu/nep/index.htm.

Here are three tried-and-true ways to enjoy real value meals - the old-fashioned kind you make at home:

- **Before you go shopping, make a plan:** Set aside a weekly planning time, like Saturday morning, preferably after you have eaten. Using supermarket sales flyers (available in newspapers and at the store) and what you already have on hand, plan meals and snacks based your family’s schedule. Involve other family members as much as possible in the process.
- **In the store, ignore the fancy displays and stick to your list:** The purpose of food displays is to tempt you into making impulse purchases. Always use a shopping list (based on your plan) and stick with it. The most nutrient-rich bargains will be on the outer edge of the store (produce, meat, dairy, and bakery), as well as in the canned and frozen food aisles.
- **As you shop, read shelf tags and price stickers carefully:** The fine print on these informative resources can help you make smart decisions between competing brands and sizes of products. While bigger sizes and store brands are usually less expensive per ounce, this is not always true. A few cents on every item can make a big difference at the cash register.

“Smart nutrition shopping strategies can help you be a ‘greener’ consumer at the same time that they save you money,” notes Dr. Paul. “Careful planning means that you will throw away less uneaten food. Buying in bulk and in larger sized containers means less packaging to throw away. This can actually be a win-win for your health and the environment.”

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana’s monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm