May 2020

As we all attempt to navigate our new “normal” there have been many unforeseen challenges. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that April saw the sharpest increase in grocery store prices in nearly 50 years. The pandemic has been affecting the supply chain in the U.S., which causes prices to rise on staples such as eggs, rice, flour and especially meat. As prices of groceries continue to rise, it creates a greater incentive to stretch your food dollar by being careful and getting creative.

When it comes to saving money at the grocery store, planning is essential. Before you plan your weekly menu, check ads to see what's on sale and take advantage of money-saving coupons. You can even sign up online to receive coupons and email alerts from your favorite grocers. Take inventory of what you have on hand so you don’t overbuy and create a detailed shopping list based on your needs and weekly menu plan. Take it a step further by taking into account how you could possibly use leftovers from previous meals.

Another method in which we can stretch our food dollars is by varying our proteins. Protein foods include both animal (meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs) and plant (beans, peas, soy products, nuts, and seeds) sources. Eat a variety of foods from the Protein Foods Group each week. Experiment with beans or peas, nuts, or soy- all of which come from our farmers as well. By adding more beans and peas (kidney, pinto, black, or white beans; split peas; chickpeas; hummus), soy products, nuts, and seeds onto our plates, we lower our intake of saturated fats and increase our fiber.

Worried about the limitation of ground beef you can buy or find at the grocery store? Add ingredients such as vegetables or other proteins to bulk up your final product when cooking! Contemplate using 1/2 lb of meat instead of a whole pound to stretch the food dollar. Proteins can be mixed (meat and plant) to stretch what you are making (example- add refried beans in with the taco meat or mix pureed mushrooms or other vegetables to stretch ground beef).

Lastly, keep in mind the importance of communicating with local producers about available meat products. There are a couple of local producers that are licensed to sell meat by cut, otherwise you can get with a beef/pork producer and buy 1/4, 1/2, or even a full animal. Although many of us have heard that most meat locker in the area are now booked out 6+ months in processing that animal- continue to talk with local producers in order to support them and find the best solutions for your needs.