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Food Check-Out Week spotlights healthy eating on a budget

SALEM—As the economic squeeze continues, many Americans remain concerned that the cost of a healthy diet is out of reach. However, according to an Agriculture Department study, the cost of eating healthy hasn't changed as much as some less-healthy alternatives. Eating healthy food while on a budget does require smart shopping

Farm Bureau's Food Check-Out Week, Feb. 21-27, 2010, focuses on helping Americans learn how to how to stretch their grocery dollars with healthy, nutritious food. America's farmers and ranchers are committed to producing safe, healthy and abundant food. And they share a common concern with consumers when it comes to putting nutritious meals on the table while sticking to a tight budget.

The good news: a recent USDA report favorably supports the economics of healthier eating. Recent food price data show that prices for unprepared, readily available fresh fruits and vegetables have remained stable relative to dessert and snack foods, such as chips, ice cream and cola. Therefore, as defined by foods in the study, the price of a "healthier" diet has not changed compared to an "unhealthy" diet.

Farm Bureau's Food Check-Out Week is aimed at helping American consumers learn how to shop effectively to put nutritious meals on the table with fewer dollars. "Learning to use your grocery dollars wisely ensures that nutrition isn't neglected," according to Anne Marie Moss, Oregon Farm Bureau Communications Director.

"Fruits and vegetables – along with whole grains, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, fish, beans, eggs and nuts – are an important part of a healthy diet. Buying fresh produce when it's in season and costs less, while buying frozen fruits and vegetables when they're not in season, is a smart way to stretch that dollar," said Moss.

Farm Bureau has developed Food Check-Out Week educational materials dedicated to helping consumers make healthier food purchases. Information on several topics including "Tips for Better Nutrition on a Tight Budget," "How Much Should I Eat?," "Understanding Food Labels" and "Understanding What MyPyramid Means" is available on Oregon Farm Bureau's website at oregonfb.org.

As part of Food Check-Out Week, on Monday, Feb. 22, the Oregon Farm Bureau Women's Advisory Council will donate $800 of food to the Ronald McDonald Houses in

Portland, recognizing the need everyone has to find solutions to feeding families healthful foods on a tight budget. The Ronald McDonald House provides a “home-away-from-home” for families of seriously ill children receiving medical treatment in the Portland area. The food will be used to help feed families staying at the house.

Now in its twelfth year, Food Check-Out Week also highlights America’s safe, abundant and affordable food supply, made possible largely by America’s productive farmers and ranchers. According to the most recent (2008) information from the USDA’s Economic Research Service, American families and individuals spend, on average, less than 10 percent of their disposable personal income for food.

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The state’s largest general farm organization, Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is a voluntary, grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing the interests of the state's farmers and ranchers in the public and policymaking arenas.

First established in Oregon in 1919, Farm Bureau is organized in all 36 counties and has more than 8,000 member families that are professionally engaged in agriculture. Barry Bushue, an east Multnomah County berry and nursery stock producer, is OFB’s 15th President.