

Your Family Could be Eating Organic Food for the Same Price as Processed Foods -- or Less

By Colleen Huber, Naturopathyworks February 16, 2005

A common perception is that whole organic food is so expensive that it is out-of-budget for the average family or even for the average single consumer. It is also commonly perceived that the average grocery purchase of processed foods at a neighborhood supermarket, using the store discounts, makes the processed food diet within the budget of most families.

If you go along with those who accept the above hypothesis on faith, you may be quite surprised by what you find in this article. Knowing what I spend on groceries in an average week for my all whole-food, mostly organic-eating family, I had to test the conventional wisdom for myself. So one day in January 2005 I went to a typical supermarket right around the corner from me to see how the other half lives ...

Health Nut Stalks Supermarket Aisles With Notebook in Hand

Jotting down in my notebook many processed foods as well as their weights and prices, with all the store savings, I prepared a long list of foods from which I could construct a hypothetical week's worth of processed food for a family of three.

Below you will find a menu of all processed food items for a week, and a list of prices for all the groceries that I hypothetically bought. Then I assembled my hypothetical purchases into a meal plan for a family of three, which you will see below, along with the price list.

Following that, you will find a week's menu and price list for mostly organic, all whole-food meals for the same family of three.

Ground Rules

For the sake of simplicity and realistic comparison, I stuck to the following constraints:

- There are no leftovers from before the beginning of the week, nor saved at the end (empty refrigerator beginning and end, and no throwing out food; everything purchased gets eaten by the three hypothetical family members).
- Unless specified otherwise, all beverage consumption is water.
- There are no separate snacks, except for Sunday afternoon, unless an individual saves part of a meal to snack on later.
- Neither the cheapest generic brands, nor the most expensive brands were chosen, but rather a brand in the middle, especially if it was on sale.
- Portions are listed per family member of a three-person family, although the heartiest appetite in the family may consume some part of the portion left by the smallest appetite. It is assumed that everyone eats the same food at the same time everyday, and that the six ounces of soda at every lunch is either carried in a thermos to work or school, or that this family is on vacation at home, eating every meal at home together and pouring their soda directly from a large bottle kept in the refrigerator.
- It is assumed that no family member is deliberately restricting calories, or is otherwise restricting any type of food.

The cold bottled coffee at breakfast may seem a bit extravagant, but consider that this replaces visits to coffee shops or any other form of coffee or tea or recreational beverage. Also, the all-processed food family does not get milk with their cereal, but rather cold, bottled, sugared coffee.

The Processed Food Menu (per person, for one week)

Sunday	3 pancakes with syrup Breakfast: 7.5-oz. cold bottled coffee 13-oz. canned ravioli Lunch: 6-oz soda Snack: ice cream sandwich 3.5-oz. frozen breaded fish 4-oz salad with dressing 6-oz soda Dinner: ice cream bar
Monday	Breakfast: 4-oz. bagel with 5 oz. jelly 9-oz frozen lunch Lunch: 6-oz soda 8-oz ground beef patties w/ ketchup, relish 6-oz french fries Dinner: ice cream bar
Tuesday	3-oz sugared cereal Breakfast: 7.5-oz cold bottled coffee instead of milk 3.5-oz frozen breaded fish Lunch: 6-oz soda 7-oz frozen corn dogs 2-oz frozen potato pancakes ketchup, relish Dinner: ice cream bar
Wednesday	

	2 toaster pastries
Breakfast:	7.5-oz cold bottled coffee
	9-oz frozen lunch
Lunch:	6-oz soda
	frozen TV dinner, individual
	1 serving flavored rice
Dinner:	ice cream bar
Thursday	
	2 toaster pastries
Breakfast:	7.5-oz cold bottled coffee
	9-oz frozen lunch
Lunch:	6-oz soda
	8-oz ground beef patties w/ ketchup, relish
	6-oz frozen french fries
Dinner:	ice cream sandwich
Friday	
	3-oz. sugared cereal
Breakfast:	7.5-oz cold bottled coffee
	9-oz frozen lunch
Lunch:	6-oz soda
	7-oz corn dogs
	2-oz potato pancakes
	ketchup
	relish
Dinner:	ice cream sandwich
Saturday	
Breakfast:	3 pancakes with syrup
	9-oz frozen pizza
Lunch:	6-oz soda
	6 oz frozen pork chops with gravy
	1 serving macaroni and cheese
	6-oz soda
Dinner:	ice cream sandwich

**Price List for the
Processed Food Menu**

17 oz pork chops with gravy	\$6.99
3 lbs ground beef patties	\$8.99
13 oz potato pancakes	\$4.19
2 lbs frozen french fries	\$2.79
2.67 lbs corn dogs	\$5.99
27 oz frozen pizza	\$4.99
12 ice cream bars	\$2.99
12 ice cream sandwiches	\$2.99
6 toaster pastries	\$2.00
6 frozen pastries	\$2.00
16 oz small jar of jelly	\$1.99
12 oz Bagels	\$0.99
1 lb TV dinner	\$3.89
1 lb TV dinner	\$3.89
14.5 oz TV dinner	\$2.50
21 oz. fillets frozen breaded fish	\$5.79
68 oz Soda	\$0.99
6 pk 16.9 oz Soda	\$2.99
40 oz canned ravioli	\$2.99
1 bottle Ketchup	\$0.99
1 bottle Relish	\$0.99
1 sm bottle salad dressing	\$1.99
17 oz sugared cereal	\$3.89
12 bottles of cold coffee with cream	\$13.47
1 sm bottle Syrup	\$1.50
20 pancakes pancake mix (add only water)	\$2.39
3 svgs flavored rice	\$1.49
12 oz packaged salad	\$2.99
12 oz frozen lunches	\$24.00
Total:	\$123.64

How do Whole Foods Compare?

Now consider a menu prepared entirely from whole, organic and free-range foods. One might consider such a diet to be extravagantly expensive. Yet the cost for a week's worth of organic whole food groceries for a family of three is about the same as for the "cheap" processed food.

The same rules apply as with the processed food. No leftovers from the beginning of the week or saved at the end (empty refrigerator beginning and end, with no waste). No restaurant eating or take-out. No beverages other than water. No snacks except for what one person may save for later from his/her apportioned meal. No deliberate calorie restriction, and everyone eats until full.

All meals are listed for one person only of a three-person family, assuming that those with larger appetites may have more, and those of smaller appetites may have an equal amount less, in order to balance out to the average portions listed below. A significant difference is that the processed food eating family gets a dessert of an ice cream bar, while the whole food eating family gets no dessert. The whole food eating family, however, generally gets much bigger meal portions. The reason behind this is partly demographic realism: those who eat denatured food are missing nutrients that they seek in desserts and other denatured foods, whereas whole food eaters feel completely full when eating in proper proportions for their [metabolic types](#).

The Whole Organic Food Menu
(per person, for one week)

A typical week's menu at our house would look like the following: Only the sliced bacon, sliced cheeses, cream cheese and goat milk are pre-packaged. Every dish is prepared at home from scratch.

Sunday	
Breakfast:	2 eggs cooked in butter 2 slices bacon
Lunch:	salad: spinach, romaine, bell pepper, 2 oz. muenster cheese, cilantro, sea salt, olive oil
Snack:	8-oz apple
Dinner:	16 oz chicken stew: part of whole chicken with potatoes, onions, celery, carrots, olive oil, balsamic vinegar, water, sea salt and curry powder
Monday	
Breakfast:	12 oz apple slices with 2 oz. almond butter 16 oz left over chicken stew 5-oz orange
Lunch:	1 oz pumpkin seeds 8 oz curry: eggplant, potato, onion, bell pepper, butter, curry powder, salt
Dinner:	4 oz cooked brown rice
Tuesday	
Breakfast:	smoothie: 10 oz goat milk and one banana and 3 oz raspberries 16 oz leftover chicken stew 2 oz cashews
Lunch:	2 oz carrots
Dinner:	3 oz salmon with ground dill
Salad:	spinach, romaine, 1 oz muenster cheese, cilantro, salt, olive oil
Wednesday	
Breakfast:	12 oz apple slices with 1 oz cream cheese 8 oz left over eggplant curry 2 oz cheddar cheese
Lunch:	1 oz pumpkin seeds 4 oz acorn squash
Dinner:	5 oz broccoli raab sauteed in olive oil
Thursday	
Breakfast:	smoothie: 10 oz goat milk, 3 oz raspberries and one banana 2 oz leftover salmon, 4 oz acorn squash and 5 oz broccoli raab
Lunch:	3 oz cashews 16 oz crockpot roast: beef, potatoes, celery, onions, carrots, sea salt
Dinner:	4 oz cooked brown rice
Friday	
Breakfast:	12 oz apple slices with 2 oz almond butter 8 oz leftover eggplant curry 2 oz cheddar cheese
Lunch:	2 oz carrots
Dinner:	16 oz leftover roast beef stew
Saturday	
Breakfast:	2 eggs with 1 oz cream cheese and spinach, cooked in butter 2 slices bacon 16 oz leftover roast beef stew
Lunch:	5 oz orange
Dinner:	salad: sardines, romaine, 1 oz muenster cheese, cilantro, salt, olive oil

**Price List for the
Whole Organic Food Menu**

1.88 lbs organic oranges	\$1.86
8.27 lbs organic Fuji apples	\$12.32
3.23 lbs organic bananas	\$2.87
2.47 lbs organic potatoes	\$1.95
2.65 lbs * organic onions	\$3.42
1 lb organic baby carrots	\$1.39
1.91 lbs * organic acorn squash	\$2.46
1 organic bell pepper	\$1.05
1.4 lbs * organic eggplant	\$2.79
1 bunch * organic cilantro	\$0.99
2 bunches * organic broccoli raab	\$4.08
1 bunch organic spinach	\$1.99
1 head organic romaine	\$1.39
1 lb organic brown rice, dry	\$1.29

1 lb raw cashews	\$4.29
6 oz * pumpkin seeds	\$1.54
12 oz almond butter, fresh ground	\$5.25
1 whole organic free-range chicken	\$9.79
1 lb copper river salmon	\$12.99
2.25 lbs organic free-range chuck roast beef	\$11.23
One package hormone-free bacon	\$3.49
1/2 gal goat milk	\$4.78
1/2 lb organic butter	\$1.79
1 dozen organic free-range eggs	\$3.49
8 oz hormone-free cream cheese	\$2.29
12 oz sliced muenster cheese	\$3.99
12 oz sliced cheddar cheese	\$3.99
20 oz. frozen raspberries	\$3.18
1 can sardines	\$1.79
1/2 pint organic olive oil	\$4.99
2 oz sea salt	\$0.20
1 oz curry powder	\$0.34
1 oz dill powder	\$0.17
small bottle balsamic vinegar	\$2.99
Total:	\$122.42

We made no attempt to quantify the salad ingredients. Fresh plants and salads are such anarchy of ingredients, they defy standardization. Cooking large meals with whole foods is a little trickier to quantify than packages of pre-weighed processed foods. The difference is made up in the leftovers. For example, the large crockpot chicken stew at the beginning of the week, the eggplant curry in the middle of the week, and the roast beef at the end are massive enough not only for everyone's dinner, but also for two days' lunches as well, with generous one-pound portions. The one-pound portions of stew are about half added water by weight. Both the salmon dinners and squash-and-broccoli raab dinners are small enough that the leftovers put together make just one lunch for the family. The advantage to cooking enormous crockpot or Dutch oven meals, with subsequent leftovers, is that although it is more time-consuming to prepare whole food from scratch, it is easier just to do it in fewer larger amounts during the week. If this still seems daunting, please see my article, [Cook Whole Food from Scratch, and Keep Your Day Job.](#)

The Bottom Line

You will notice the savings of \$1.22 with a mostly organic, whole-food diet. In fact, our organic food price list shows higher than realistic prices in two ways: The prices shown are at retail health food stores in the Phoenix area. But also in this area, there are at least three organic food-buying groups, with prices for organic produce at about \$1.00 per pound. To find organic food buying groups, co-ops, health food stores, local retail farms and farmers markets in your area, see localharvest.com.

Furthermore, if you have a backyard, especially here in the Southwest, you can save further in ways that processed food eaters can't: Almost all year we grow salad greens, herbs, braising greens of some kind and/or various squashes. (The salad herbs oregano, thyme, mint and parsley never quit here in any season!)

Subtracting the prices of what we are currently pulling out of our backyard garden from what is on the sample menu:

Organic cilantro:	\$0.99
And organic broccoli raab:	<u>\$4.08</u>
We save an additional:	\$5.07

Which means we spend only \$122.42 - \$5.07 = \$117.35 in an average week for a three-person family, which is \$6.29 less than the family eating all processed food.

Of course, gardeners in colder climates tend to have really prolific harvests in summer and fall, which is when they will realize much better savings. Processed food eaters are entirely dependent on commercial supply, no matter what the season.

However, the biggest savings of the whole-food eating family has yet to be calculated, as we consider the difference in medical care needs between whole food eaters on the one hand, and those who will continue eating for decades such chemicals as MSG (a.k.a. hydrolyzed wheat protein and several other names), carcinogens or nerve poisons (a.k.a. pesticides), sugar, aspartame and other sweeteners, as well as margarine and other trans-fatty acids, to name some of the most infamous processed food ingredients.

As a wise saying goes, the best reason to eat organic is that pesticides don't know when to stop killing. Now answer honestly: Can you afford NOT to eat whole organic food?