

BUYING REAL FOODS ON A TIGHT BUDGET OR PUBLIC BENEFITS

A big barrier to nutritious eating is accessing and affording real foods. Fake foods are cheap, convenient, and last for a long time. Fresh foods spoil and can be expensive. Preparing real foods takes time, skill, and cooking equipment. Families relying on food donations or living far from grocery stores often struggle to find fresh options.

Here are some unprocessed foods that are less expensive and can be covered by public benefits in the United States:¹

- Bananas
- Apples
- Tomatoes
- Romaine or iceberg lettuce
- Frozen vegetables
- Frozen fruits
- Dried or canned beans
- Corn tortillas
- Oats
- Potatoes
- Canned tuna or salmon
- Chicken
- Pork chops
- Pure ground beef
- White or brown rice
- All-purpose flour

These items can be found at most grocery stores and some corner or convenience stores. Some items—like flour or oats—can be purchased in bulk. Other items are less expensive when they are in season. Frozen foods can be an excellent choice when spoilage or off-season purchasing is a concern. Amazingly, they can offer even more nutritional benefits than fresh options.² If you are involved in food drives and donations, make sure shoppers have access to fresh and healthy foods. At a minimum, food pantries should offer large freezers with fresh-to-frozen foods.

¹As of April 2025.

²Drayer, L. (2019, May 30). *Why frozen fruit and veggies may be better for you than fresh*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/30/health/frozen-fruit-vegetables-draye-food>