



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/saving-money-living-well-wednesday>

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Penny Pinching: Money-saving ideas for buying groceries, cooking at home

K-State experts share tips during Living Well Wednesday webinar

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – It’s a question on many consumers’ minds currently.

“What if you could save ‘blank’ dollars per month at the store, and it would only take you ‘blank’ minutes per week?” said Janelle VanKooten, a regional specialist for the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education](#) (known as SNAP-Ed) in northwest Kansas.

Sounds like a good idea, right?

“Filling in the blanks here will probably look different for each of us, because we all have different budgets, different schedules and different taste preferences that we’re working with,” VanKooten said. “But for reference, if you shop once per week – about four times per month – and you lower your shopping costs by \$12.50 per week, you would save \$50 in one month” – or \$600 each year.

VanKooten and Ashley Svaty – K-State Research and Extension’s family and consumer sciences specialist in northwest Kansas – were the featured speakers during the [Living Well Wednesday series](#), a free online program offered the second Wednesday of the month in the spring and fall.

Their session was titled, ‘Pinchin’ Pennies in the Kitchen.’

“You don’t have to do a complete overhaul of your budget or how you shop in order to save money,” VanKooten said. “I encourage you to pick one or two adjustments that would work well for you and make them good, solid habits.”

Some helpful tips to help save money and time include:

Make a weekly dinner plan

VanKooten suggests marking on a menu calendar which nights you might be able to prep food, and which night’s that might not be possible.

“This allows you to plan a meal a day or two ahead of time, and then plan on leftovers for busier nights, or to shop for items that will not take a lot of time to prepare,” she said.

Use what you have on hand

VanKooten uses an example of what to do with leftover bread: “In my house, it’s usually (used for) French toast or sandwiches. When you’re planning your grocery list, see what you have on hand and then you can plan your grocery list based on what items you need to fill in.”

VanKooten noted that the [U.S. Department of Agriculture’s MyPlate website](#) – a guideline for Americans to eat more healthfully – has an online menu planning calendar to help develop a grocery list.

Shop from the sale flyer

VanKooten encourages consumers to fill in their menu for the week with sale items. “Look for things that could work for you and your family,” as opposed to just buying sale items, she said.

Buying store brands can save you money

Svaty acknowledges that some brands simply don’t taste as good as the national brand, “but be open to the idea of trying cheaper brands if you see them.”

“You’ll win sometimes, but sometimes your family will prefer the other brand,” she said.

Buy items in bulk

Many foods can be bought in bulk to save your family money, such as meat, oatmeal, rice, pasta and canned goods. These foods can be stored safely and used over time.

“When it’s on sale, meat can be purchased in bulk and frozen for later use,” Svaty said. “It can help save more than just a few pennies in the kitchen.”

Pay attention to unit pricing

Svaty said convenience often means you’re paying more for the same amount of product.

“For example,” she said, “for \$2.99, we can purchase six ounces of chopped onions, or we can purchase one pound of onions for sixty-nine cents. You can get 4.33 pounds of onions for the price of that six ounces. I will gladly chop my own onions for that cost savings.”

Svaty adds: “Paying close attention to unit pricing on all items and comparing items will save you money, not just on produce and convenience items.”

Fruits and vegetables

“It is possible to eat nutritiously on a budget,” Svaty said. “And you can save money by shopping your store’s sale items.”

For example, if planning a recipe that calls for a certain fruit or vegetable, switch it up with an alternative that is currently on sale. “If you need an out-of-season option, you can instead choose frozen, canned, or even dried,” Svaty said.

Some items are nearing their sell-by dates; Svaty urges consumers to look for products that they will use in meals within a day or two to take advantage of marked-down prices.

Make a list...and stick with it!

"I'm thinking of some of the non-essentials that my family might want and that I might just throw into the cart," Svaty said. "Well, those really add up...as much as \$20 per week."

She adds: "Think of that over a year; how much could that save you? Stick with the list and what you have planned."

Watch the prices at the checkout stand

Mistakes happen; sometimes foods ring up at the wrong price. "You've done all this work to plan and have taken the time to find your deals," Svaty said. "If your foods don't ring up at the right price, and you don't catch it, that can be a bummer."

Eat — and plan for — leftovers

Leftovers not only reduce food waste, but also cut down on meal prep time – which is especially useful on nights when families have other activities going on.

"Some options might be to double a recipe on a night when you cook," VanKooten said. "Another might be when you're browning hamburger for one meal, plan another meal that includes ground beef and cook both meals on the same night" – such as tacos one night and spaghetti the next.

VanKooten and Svaty also encourage consumers to remember food safety in the kitchen, including the principles of Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill. More information is [available online at foodsafety.gov](#), and from [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Kansas Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), <https://www.k-state.edu/ks-snaped>

Living Well Wednesday online webinars, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/fcs/livingwellwed>

Food Safety (U.S government website), <https://www.foodsafety.gov>

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

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