

**The Food Stamp Challenge as experienced by Jan and Russ Melby**  
**March 8-11 and 15 through 17, 2008**

Friends, we are sharing our thoughts and meal plans with you in the hope that you might find these reflections and meal examples helpful. In addition, we have listed the food purchased for 7 days of eating, along with the unit and total costs. We would love to see your food lists and what you ate, too, along with any reflections you may wish to share.

We found our 7 days of eating on almost \$42.00 to be quite manageable, and, contrary to any “fears” Russ had, centering on “getting enough to eat,” we had plenty to eat. We never felt “hungry” or too moody. What Russ experienced more than Jan was the loss of “buying power” to purchase a cup of Starbucks on Saturdays, when he is in town and doing errands, or stopping by Panera’s for a “pumpkin muffie” and paying \$2.75 for a muffie and coffee to go. Further, it was a little frustrating knowing that we could not buy “whatever” we wished to purchase, within reason.

We were aware, too, of our middle class benefits, such as well-running cars to drive to several grocery stores to do some comparison- shopping. We also did not have to be concerned about “condiments” or paper and cleaning products during our 7 days of eating on \$42.00. We also benefited from “snacks” as part of colleagues and friends’ hospitality, as reported in our daily meal schedules. Further, we knew we could wash clothing and dishes using the soap we had on hand.

We wondered how folks on limited incomes felt as they shop in grocery stores, knowing their options are limited. In other words, the loss of economic freedom in food purchases was probably our biggest frustration, though, to be sure, Russ experienced this more than Jan. Likewise, drinking “inferior” coffee and “inexpensive” wine were minor concessions. But, the fair trade coffee we drank on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> day was truly appreciated!

Benefits included “knowing” that we could, at least for awhile, spend \$42.00 and have a far greater amount of food left over than we anticipated. We felt a certain “empowerment,” knowing that we could, if necessary, eat reasonably well on our limited food budget, at least for a week. The experience has made us better comparison shoppers. It just takes a little more time in the grocery stores. We did not use coupons, mostly due to our habits of not doing so. We also learned, and appreciate, the importance of planning our shopping trips (Russ enjoys shopping more than Jan) to maximize our purchasing, thereby minimizing the number of times we drive to the grocery store.

As mentioned above, we did not have to be concerned about paper and other necessities such as dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo, and other household items. We wondered if folks on limited income have to choose between toothpaste and tomatoes. We did not experience going to a food pantry, being registered as guests, handed a bag of groceries, and left to wonder whether or not we “deserved” the food, in spite of the best efforts of volunteers who might try to make us feel welcome. We did not have to experience turning down invitations to go out for “coffee” or “beer” knowing that we could not afford to say “yes.”

We spent almost \$42.00 on groceries, and determined, following the end of our seven days of eating, that the cost of the condiments we consumed (and were already in our cupboards and refrigerator) were

“offset” by the food we had left-over. We purchased all but a few dollars worth of groceries on Saturday, March 8, at Aldi Foods Store # 48, Cub Foods, and HyVee, all located in Ames.

<b>Aldi Food Store #48, March 8</b>	
Sack of apples (10 apples)	\$1.89
Tangerines (12 tangerines)	1.99
Carrots (2 lbs)	.89
Flat Leaf Spinach	1.49
Broccoli Crowns	1.39
Green Peppers	1.69
Long Grain Rice (3 lbs)	1.19
Orange Juice from Concentrate (liquid)	1.99
All Purpose Flour	.89
Yogurt (8- 8 oz. containers .43 cents each)	3.44
Cocktail Crackers	.99
Pinto Beans	.79
Diced tomatoes with Green Chiles	.49
Penne Pasta	.89
Large Eggs (one dozen)	1.39
Thin Sliced (“ham”) in two packages	.78
One Gallon 2% White Milk	2.79
Premium Bag of Drip Coffee (12oz.)	2.99
Creamy Peanut Butter (12 oz.)	1.29
Large container of oats (generic brand)	1.69
<b>TOTAL (29 items purchased at Aldi’s)</b>	<b>\$31.39</b>

<b>Cub Food Store, March 8</b>	
2 packages of Chicken Breasts (1.32 lb pkgs) @ \$0.99	1.98
1 bottle of Sutterhome Zinfandel (Red)	3.89
<b>TOTAL (2 items purchased at Cub’s)</b>	<b>\$5.87</b>

<b>Wal Mart, March 15</b>	
1 Gallon of 2% White Milk	\$2.98

<b>HyVee, March 15</b>	
2 bananas	.52

<b>Day Old Bread Store</b>	
1 loaf of day old bread	1.00
<b>GRAND TOTAL spent on food for 7 days</b>	<b>\$41.76</b>

<b>“Condiments” Consumed and Purchased Prior to March 8: Food on Hand</b>
1 and ½ sticks of butter
1 cup Olive Oil
½ cup Raspberry Jelly
5 small onions
2 small scallions (I think scallions are small)
Salt, Pepper, Italian Seasoning, curry powder, cayenne pepper, garlic seasoning, oregano, basil, dill, lemon-pepper
4 cloves of garlic
3 tea bags
yeast for baking bread
4 cashews

<b>Food Left-Over from the \$41.76 and Still Useable</b>
1 Egg
1/4 <sup>th</sup> Gallon of Milk
8 oz. of uncooked Rice
10 oz. Generic Oats
1 carrot
2 lbs of Flour
3 Tangerines
3/4ths of an Apple
1 can 14.5 oz. of canned tomatoes
2 popovers (baked)
1/8 <sup>th</sup> loaf of bread ( homemade oat bread)
1 pkg (2.5 oz) of “ham”
2 oz. of drip coffee (dry)
2 cups of cooked rice and beans
1 cup of stir-fried cooked chicken
19 cocktail crackers
5 ounces of peanut butter
3 cups of fresh spinach
1 “crown” of broccoli
½ green paper

<b>Discarded (thrown away) Food</b>
1/4 <sup>th</sup> cup cooked oat meal

**MEALS**

**Breakfast, March 8**

Two Bowls of cooked Oatmeal (made from one cup dry oatmeal)  
½ of banana (Russ)  
coffee (Jan and Russ)  
1 slice of toast (Russ)  
1 tablespoon peanut butter (Russ)  
½ cooked apple (“sprinkled” on oatmeal)

**Lunch, March 8**

Friend Egg Sandwiches (3 eggs used)  
Two pieces of toasted bread  
Fresh Spinach, uncooked.  
Milk to drink  
1 tangerine (halved)  
1 Dove chocolate square (on hand)

**Supper, March 8**

Stir-fried Chicken  
Rice  
½ Onion, broccoli, two carrots, ½ green pepper (stir-fried)  
two glasses of milk  
one baked banana with orange sauce from o. j.  
two slices of toast with peanut butter

**Saturday evening, March 8**

Jan made a loaf of oatmeal bread in our bread-maker for later consumption.

**Sunday Morning, March 9**

Breakfast  
Two bowls of Oatmeal, ½ of an apple, cooked and diced, ½ banana, and milk  
Two slices of oatmeal bread toast; peanut butter (Russ)  
Two glasses (5 oz. each) of orange juice  
Coffee  
At Church: One donut hole (Russ)

**Lunch, March 9**

Chicken with Dumplings, Rice, Carrots, and Onion Soup (using chicken left on the bone from previous evening's chicken breasts)

Homemade Oatmeal Bread (2 slices)  
Raspberry Jelly  
1 tangerine (halved)  
Water to drink

**Afternoon Visit at Friend's House (March 9)**

Jan and Russ were served coffee and one piece each of cheese cake

**Sunday evening, March 9**

Cuban Style Black Beans and Rice, 3 garlic cloves, and half a green pepper  
Tossed salad of spinach, carrots, broccoli, and 2 tablespoons of Salad Dressing  
½ apple, prepared in the micro wave, with sprinkle of oats, a little brown sugar  
Two Glasses of Milk

**Monday Breakfast, March 10**

Two Bowls of Oatmeal, (Russ spilled half of his in the micro-wave)  
Milk, 2 glasses of orange juice  
One piece of toast, with peanut butter (Russ)  
One banana  
Coffee

**At Monday morning Interfaith Discussion Group (Russ)**

Russ ate one roll and some fresh fruit, provided by one of the group members,

**Lunch, Monday, March 10, 2008**

Jan-at office, left-over chicken and dumpling soup, water to drink  
Russ, at office- left-over stir-fried chicken, “layered” with rice and vegetables, cooked in microwave  
Russ-one vanilla “kiddie-sized frosty” from Wendy’s, given to him by one of his colleagues, who had received it free from Wendy’s.  
½ banana

**Supper, Monday, March 10**

Russ (at office)  
Processed Ham Sandwich with fresh, uncooked spinach  
8oz. Blueberry Yogurt  
One apple, One slice oatmeal bread  
Carrot sticks  
Coffee

**Jan’s Supper (at work)**

One container (8oz) of Yogurt  
One slice oatmeal bread  
Water

**Bedtime Snack**

Jan and Russ  
One tangerine, halved  
Eight crackers with peanut butter  
Two glasses (8oz. each) of wine (Red Zinfandel)

**Breakfast, Tuesday, March 11**

Two bowls of oatmeal

1/3<sup>rd</sup> apple, “cubed” and cooked  
½ banana  
Two glasses of orange juice (5 oz) each  
One glass of milk  
One slice of homemade oatmeal bread, toasted, with peanut butter

### **Lunch, Tuesday, March 11**

Russ, preceded by late morning hunger event at Grand View College  
One hot-cross bun and glass of juice, served by host.  
Russ, in Office, for lunch  
Three slices of bread, two with peanut butter, one with peanut butter and jelly  
One 8oz. container of yogurt  
Carrot sticks  
One apple

Jan, in Office  
One eight ounce container of yogurt  
One tangerine  
½ slice homemade oatmeal bread  
4 cashews  
glass of water

### **Supper, March 11, 2008**

Jan and Russ at home  
Left-over Cuban-style Black beans  
Two glasses of Milk  
Cooked vegetables (in microwave): carrots, green peppers, spinach, and onions  
One slice store-bought toast (dry)  
Eight Ounces of dry Penne pasta, cooked  
¾ can of diced tomatoes (approximately 10 ounces)

### **Evening Snack (Russ)**

One slice of toast with peanut butter and jelly, cup of hot tea

**Due to Russ’ travel schedule which took him out of town from March 12-14, Jan and Russ decided to wait until Saturday, March 15, to re-start their Food Stamp Challenge Meal Plan. We are conscious that this “break” may have eased Food Stamp Challenge. We don’t know if our reactions to going 4 “on,” 3 “off” and 3 on would have made a difference in our moods or ability to function well.**

### **Saturday Breakfast, March 15**

Two bowls of oatmeal, and half an apple, diced and cooked  
Two- 5oz. glasses of orange juice  
One slice of store-bought toast with peanut butter  
Coffee

**Saturday Lunch**

Three egg omelet with spinach, scallions, and green peppers  
Four slices of bread (from second loaf of home-made oat bread) and peanut butter  
One tangerine (halved)  
Two glasses of white milk

**Saturday Supper**

Two glasses of Red Zinfandel  
Stir-fried chicken with broccoli, carrots, and onions  
One slice homemade bread  
Two glasses of water  
One cooked apple with oatmeal topping, brown sugar, and touch of butter

**Sunday, March 16, Breakfast**

Two glasses of orange juice  
Two mugs of coffee  
Two bowls of oatmeal  
½ banana, sliced  
½ cooked and diced apple and a bit of butter

Russ-one donut hole at “coffee time” between church services

**Sunday, March 16, Lunch**

Jan (lunch at church; a meeting—substituted another noon meal of yogurt, fruit, and bread during the “between days” for this lunch)

Russ, at home:

Two scrambled eggs, with “chunks” of green peppers, onions, left-over canned tomatoes  
One glass of milk  
Two slices of toast: one homemade and one store-bought

**Sunday afternoon, en-route to a Peace March in Des Moines**

Russ took one carton of yogurt (still un-opened in office fridge)  
One apple (consumed)  
Small thermos of coffee (the coffee was consumed after the march and worship service)

**Sunday evening Supper, March 16**

Chicken and Dumpling Soup  
Left over cooked Rice and carrots  
½ onion, stir-fried  
Two glasses of milk  
One tangerine (halved)

**Monday, March 17, Breakfast**

Jan, ½ cup oatmeal cooked  
Glass of orange juice

2/3<sup>rd</sup>s cup of milk  
1/4<sup>th</sup> cooked apple  
coffee

Russ (early departure to interfaith discussion group located at the Iowa CROP Office Building)  
1/3<sup>rd</sup> cup oatmeal (drop of milk)  
½ banana  
Glass of orange juice  
Coffee  
Sweet Roll at Discussion Group

### **Lunch, March 17**

Jan, eight ounce container of yogurt  
One slice of Oatmeal bread  
One tangerine  
Water to drink

Russ, One bowl of chicken dumpling soup with carrots and rice  
One slice oatmeal bread with peanut butter  
Apple  
Coffee and Water to drink

### **Supper, St. Patrick's Day, March 17**

Rice and Cuban style beans with garlic and onions  
Left-over chicken stir-fry with broccoli, carrots, and onions  
Two glasses of milk  
Two popovers (baked) made from flour, eggs, butter, and a few dollops of raspberry jelly

### **Bed time snack**

Two 3 oz. glasses of Red Zinfandel wine (end of bottle)  
4 crackers each

### **A Few Final Reflections**

We were surprised that we were able to eat a diet fairly similar to the diet we typically eat with the exception of adding beans and rice and using cooked oatmeal vs. a mixture of uncooked oatmeal and granola. We consumed more eggs and less meat than usual, although we generally do not consume meat in large quantities. A minor sacrifice was the exclusive use of 2% milk vs. a combination of 2% and skim milk. We thought and talked more about food than usual, especially in terms of planning what we could eat, how to space out our food resources, and whether or not we could afford to purchase additional items toward the end of the 7 days. In some ways we actually appreciated our food more by being conscious of what we consumed. A few of our food habits have changed after our experience of living on \$42. We are consuming and enjoying cooked oatmeal for breakfast. We rediscovered the joy of home baked bread. We have become more careful shoppers. We are even more grateful for the gifts that we are blessed with every day of our lives.