



Highlights: Supermarkets

The latest issue of *Boston Consumers' CHECKBOOK* magazine, available at www.checkbook.org, compares local supermarkets for price and quality, evaluates membership warehouse stores, supermarket alternatives Trader Joe's and Aldi, and gives tips on how to save on groceries anywhere you shop.

Comparing supermarkets for price and quality

CHECKBOOK compared prices at local supermarkets using an apples-to-apples market basket of 151 items, and compared quality based on surveys of CHECKBOOK and *Consumer Reports* subscribers. Highlights include:

- The area's price leaders were Walmart, DeMoulas Market Basket, and Hannaford Supermarkets. Walmart's prices averaged about seven percent lower than the average prices at the Stop & Shop stores CHECKBOOK shopped and 14 percent lower than the prices at the surveyed Shaw's stores. DeMoulas Market Basket's prices were about five percent lower than Stop & Shop's and 13 percent lower than Shaw's. Hannaford's prices were about 12 percent lower than Shaw's. For a family that spends \$200 per week at the supermarket, a five to 14 percent price difference could total \$520 to \$1,450 a year.
- Stop & Shop's prices were roughly eight percent lower than Shaw's.
- Wegmans, with three stores in the area, strikes a unique balance of low prices and great quality. Its prices were seven percent lower than Shaw's, and Wegmans received the area's best ratings for quality with 93 percent of its surveyed customers rating it "superior" overall.
- Target, which was a big winner for price in CHECKBOOK's previous surveys, had prices roughly the same as Stop & Shop's and only seven percent lower than Shaw's.
- Surveyed stores for Star Market, Roche Bros., Donelan's Supermarkets, and Sudbury Farms had higher prices than Stop & Shop and Shaw's. Star's prices were about five percent higher than average prices at Stop & Shop and Shaw's; Roche Bros. about 12 percent higher; Donelan's about 14 percent higher; and Sudbury Farms about 19 percent higher.
- Price leaders Hannaford and DeMoulas Market Basket received higher-than-average scores on CHECKBOOK's customer survey. DeMoulas Market Basket was rated "superior" overall by a respectable 73 percent of its surveyed customers and Hannaford by 72 percent—proving it is possible for stores besides Wegmans to offer both reasonable prices and high quality.
- On the other hand, Shaw's, Star Market, Stop & Shop, and Walmart received relatively poor ratings. All four of these chains rated near the bottom of the list for "quality of fresh produce," "quality of meats," and "overall quality." For "overall quality," Walmart was rated "superior" by only 16 percent of its surveyed customers, Shaw's by only 35 percent, Stop & Shop by 37 percent, and Star Market by 44 percent.
- Whole Foods Market had the survey's highest prices. Whole Foods' prices were 48 percent higher than the average prices CHECKBOOK found at the surveyed Shaw's and Stop & Shop stores—for the limited number of comparable items available at each chain. On the other hand, Whole Foods consistently receives very high scores on quality of fresh produce and meat, which account for many of the items CHECKBOOK could compare between Whole Foods and the other chains.

Alternatives to the Supermarket—Trader Joe's and Aldi

- Trader Joe's received higher overall ratings than average on CHECKBOOK's survey of customers, but Trader Joe's prices were higher than those of most other area chains.

- Aldi's prices were an astounding 38 percent lower than the Stop & Shop/Shaw's average for CHECKBOOK's full market basket including comparable national-brand items.
- Trader Joe's and Aldi both have a much more limited selection of products than traditional supermarkets—only 42 percent of the items in CHECKBOOK's market basket were available at Trader Joe's and only 63 percent at Aldi, so their customers will also have to shop elsewhere.

Buying in Bulk—Warehouse Clubs

- For purchasing certain grocery items, membership warehouse stores offer low-cost alternatives to supermarkets. CHECKBOOK surveyed Costco, BJ's, and Sam's Club.
- For the items that could be compared, based on unit prices (price per pound, for example), the surveyed membership warehouse stores offered dramatic savings. The surveyed Sam's Club store, for example, beat the Shaw's store it was compared to by a whopping 31 percent. And compared to that Shaw's store, the savings were about 29 percent at Costco and 28 percent at BJ's.
- Most consumers will not be able to do all their shopping at a warehouse store. An option is to buy what you can at a warehouse store and then buy remaining products at a supermarket, purchasing national brands of the cheapest size. Following that method with a Costco store and a Stop & Shop store, a shopper could expect to save about 13 percent compared to shopping at Stop & Shop alone.

Money-saving tips wherever you shop

- Plan meals and make lists and stick to them. This will help limit impulse buying and multiple shopping trips. Shoppers can make a list of commonly purchased items in the order they come to them in the aisles, then print copies or save it in a smart phone. Mark up the list before each supermarket trip.
- Don't shop while hungry.
- Keep track of wasted food and adjust quantities purchased on future trips.
- Shop specials. If an item is priced exceptionally well, buy in quantity.
- Consider substituting store brand or generics for national brands. When CHECKBOOK allowed the substitution of cheaper generic and store brands for about one-sixth of the items in its price-shopping market basket at Stop & Shop and Shaw's, the total cost for the basket dropped by about four percent.
- Go online for coupons. Most manufacturers have printable coupons on their websites, and shoppers can get even more from sites such as SmartSource.com, Coupons.com, or RedPlum.com. Some stores allow you to add coupons onto your store loyalty card via store websites and apps.
- Buy inexpensive cuts of meat and learn ways to cook them. Or eat less meat to save money.
- Avoid stores' spending traps. It's no coincidence that impulse items are located at the ends of the aisles and dairy items are often located in the rear of the store. Stores know the more items you pass en route to what you need, the more likely you are to pick up items you didn't intend to get.
- Eat what's in season. Savings change with growing seasons. Also compare the price of fresh produce to frozen or canned.
- Compare weights when selecting item-priced produce. One head of lettuce may be significantly larger than another yet cost the same.
- Don't pay for small conveniences. Slicing your own cheese and chopping vegetables saves money.
- If the least expensive stores are not convenient for every week's shopping, keep them in mind for times when you will be going by them anyway.

The media may draw freely on the information on supermarkets in the new issue of Boston Consumers' CHECKBOOK magazine and at www.checkbook.org. CHECKBOOK's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.

