



Highlights: Supermarkets

The latest issue of *Chicago Consumers' CHECKBOOK* magazine, available at www.checkbook.org, compares local supermarkets for price and quality, evaluates membership warehouse stores and other alternatives to conventional supermarkets, 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 standouts were Walmart, Woodman's Foods, and Meijer. Compared to average prices at all surveyed stores, prices were significantly lower at Walmart (11 to 13 percent lower than the average prices at all surveyed stores), Woodman's (12 percent lower), and Meijer (10 percent lower). For a family that spends \$200 per week at the supermarket, a 10 to 13 percent price difference could total \$1,040 to \$1,350 a year.
- Mariano's, which now has 33 stores in the Chicago area, continues to wow with high ratings for quality and low prices. Mariano's received high ratings from its customers for quality of produce, quality of meats, and overall quality, and its prices were about five percent lower than the all-store average.
- Prices at the Target stores CHECKBOOK surveyed were only about two percent lower than the all-store average.
- Prices at the surveyed Jewel-Osco stores were three percent and six percent higher than the all-store average.
- Whole Foods Market had the highest prices in CHECKBOOK's survey; it had prices 69 percent higher than the all-store average for the limited number of comparable items included on the survey. On the other hand, Whole Foods receives very high scores for quality of fresh produce and meat, which account for many of the items CHECKBOOK could compare between Whole Foods and other chains.
- There are big quality differences among area stores. Butera Market, Food 4 Less, Jewel-Osco, Target, Ultra Foods and Walmart received low ratings from their surveyed customers for "quality of fresh produce," "quality of meats," and "overall quality." Walmart received the lowest overall ratings: Only 27 percent of its customers rated it "superior" overall. Woodman's received low ratings for produce and meat, but high ratings for "overall quality." But some area stores fared very well in terms of quality: Mariano's, Sunset Foods, Walt's Food Center, and a few other markets each received "superior" overall ratings from more than 85 percent of their surveyed customers.

Alternatives to the Supermarket—Trader Joe's and Aldi

- Trader Joe's overall ratings on CHECKBOOK's survey of customers were higher than most area chains; yet Trader Joe's generally charges prices that are about the same as average.
- Aldi's prices were an astounding 40 percent lower than the all-store average for CHECKBOOK's full market basket including comparable national-brand items. But these savings come with a downside: Aldi was rated relatively low on many aspects of quality—but not as low as Jewel-Osco, Target, or Walmart.
- Trader Joe's and Aldi both have a much more limited selection of products than traditional supermarkets—only 38 percent of the items in CHECKBOOK's market basket were available at Trader Joe's and only 58 percent at Aldi, so their customers will also have to shop elsewhere.

Buying in Bulk—Warehouse Clubs

- For the items in CHECKBOOK's market basket 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 Jewel-Osco store it was compared to by a whopping 24 percent. And compared to that Jewel-Osco store, the savings were about 23 percent at Costco.
- While warehouse clubs offer significant savings compared to Walmart, Woodman's, and Meijer, those savings perhaps may not be enough to justify the clubs' annual membership fees if you don't shop the clubs often.
- Since you can't typically get everything you need at a warehouse store, CHECKBOOK looked at the potential savings of shopping at both a warehouse store and a supermarket, assuming you would purchase the lowest-cost size available at either place. For example, CHECKBOOK found that by shopping at Costco and Mariano's, you could save about eight percent compared with shopping at Mariano's 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 substitutes cheaper generic and store brands for about one-sixth of the items in its price-shopping market basket, the total cost for the basket typically drops by about five 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.

The media may draw freely on the information on supermarkets in the new issue of Chicago 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.

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