



Highlights: Supermarkets

The latest issue of *Delaware Valley 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:

- Wegmans once again wowed us with very high customer ratings for quality and low prices. The Rochester, NY-based chain operates nine area locations and ranks No. 1 for quality among our raters (an astounding 92 percent rated it “superior” overall). CHECKBOOK found its prices to be nine percent lower than average prices at Acme Markets.
- The area’s other price standouts were Walmart, Target, and Redner’s. Compared to average prices at Acme, prices were substantially lower at Walmart (16 percent), Target (11 percent), and Redner’s (about eight percent). For a family that spends \$200 per week at the supermarket, a 16 percent price difference could total a savings of \$1,660 a year. An eight percent price difference could equal more than \$830 in savings.
- Giant, Food Lion, and ShopRite offer prices six to seven percent lower than Acme’s.
- Among the area’s largest chains, Pathmark’s prices were highest—about 10 percent higher than Acme’s. This is a departure from our previous price surveys, which found Acme to have the highest prices among the big chains.
- Whole Foods Market had the highest prices in our survey, about 33 percent higher than Acme’s, for the limited number of comparable items available at each chain. On the other hand, Whole Foods consistently receives very high scores for quality of fresh produce and meat, which account for many of the items we could compare between Whole Foods and other chains.
- Other than Wegmans and Whole Foods, few area stores got high ratings from their customers for quality of meat and produce and overall quality. Walmart’s ratings were the worst in our survey, with only 16 percent of its customers rating it “superior” overall.

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 stores, yet Trader Joe’s generally charges the same prices as Acme.
- Aldi’s prices were an astounding 42 percent lower than Acme’s for our full market basket including comparable national-brand items. And Aldi’s overall ratings on quality by customers were higher overall than most of its much-higher-priced competition.
- Trader Joe’s and Aldi both have a much more limited selection of products than traditional supermarkets—only 40 percent of the items in CHECKBOOK’s market basket were available at Trader Joe’s and only 60 percent at Aldi, so their customers also will 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 BJ’s, Costco, and Sam’s Club. These membership warehouse stores had few if any of the items in CHECKBOOK’s market basket in standard sizes. But when the researchers looked for the same brands regardless of size, membership warehouse stores offered a

larger portion of the market basket items. BJ's had 61 percent, Sam's Club had 54 percent, and Costco had 37 percent.

- 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 Acme store it was compared to by a whopping 34 percent. And compared to that Acme store, the savings were about 32 percent at the surveyed Costco store and 25 percent at the surveyed 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 Giant store could be expected to save a shopper about nine percent compared to shopping at Acme alone, according to CHECKBOOK's comparisons.

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 trip to the supermarket.
- 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 generic products 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, the total cost for the market basket dropped by about five percent, on average, at the area's big chains.
- 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, eliminating the need to bring and use physical coupons.
- 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, chopping vegetables, or making sauce 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 Delaware Valley 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.