

# Limited revenue? If yes, where to shop?

**The Common Front investigated for you**



**Common Front for Social Justice**

[www.frontnb.ca](http://www.frontnb.ca)

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## Introduction

Access to nutritious food is essential to stay healthy. In New Brunswick (N.B.), as well as in Canada, people living on a limited budget are finding increasingly difficult to purchase the quantity and quality of food recommended by Health Canada. Deprived of a proper diet their health is compromised.

Nutritional requirements, as a human right, cannot be properly fulfilled if money is lacking. Such is the fate of thousands of N.B. citizens and their families, mainly welfare recipients, single-parent families earning minimum wage, part-time workers on a low income, workers on Employment Insurance, low-income seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement, post-secondary students, and professional artists. Many of these citizens are food insecure. In a country as rich as Canada, food insecurity is, unfortunately, a reality for many. We only have to look at the increasing number of people relying on food banks in N.B. Since 2008, 4 351 more people relied on food banks, which represent a 27.8% increase (see Appendix 1).

The NB Common Front for Social Justice Inc. (CFSJ) is a non-profit organization committed to greater solidarity within society, particularly with people living in poverty. In 2010, 2011 and 2012, the CFSJ carried out food surveys using the standardized tool developed by Health Canada, namely the National Nutritious Food Basket<sup>1</sup>. The results of the three surveys are posted on the CFSJ website ([www.frontnb.ca](http://www.frontnb.ca)).

This year, our survey targeted food on sale during the month of November 2013 in the Greater Moncton area.

### 1. Objectives of the food survey

The November 2013 Food Survey was carried out in Moncton and Dieppe, and had the following objectives:

1. Using the tool developed by Health Canada (National Nutritious Food Basket), record the price of 67 food items (dairy products, protein-rich foods, fruit and vegetables, cereal products and lipid-rich foods) in three food outlets: Sobeys (Champlain Place), Atlantic Superstore (Moncton) and Co-op (Dieppe).
2. On the four Thursdays of November 2013, compare the regular food price to the sale price in three food outlets in order to determine how many food items were on sale, in which food category, and the impact on consumers.
3. Analyze the cost of the nutritious food basket in relation to the revenue of four different households.
4. Make recommendations to address the problem of food insecurity in N.B.



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<sup>1</sup> Health Canada. National Nutritious Food Basket, see: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/basket-panier/index-eng.php>.

## 2. Methodology

The members of the research team were Jean-Claude Basque, CFSJ provincial coordinator, and five collaborators from the CFSJ<sup>2</sup>. Every team member was instructed on how to carry out the National Nutritious Food Basket methodology developed by Health Canada<sup>3</sup>. The tool measures the cost of healthy eating, based on *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*, and includes 67 items: dairy products, protein-rich foods, fruit and vegetables, cereal-based products and some fats and oils (see the list in Appendix B). The list only includes items featured in the *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* and excludes sugar, ice cream and all sweets. When an item is on sale, the lower price is selected as this is the probable decision made by low-income people. One must keep in mind that this is a fast estimate of food cost and is not a representation of the consumption pattern of the middle and upper-middle classes.

The survey targeted three food outlets on the first day of weekly sales in November 2013. Team members visited each store on Thursday, November 7, Thursday, November 14, Thursday, November 21, and Thursday, November 28, for a total of 12 visits.



The following food outlets were surveyed:

- **Sobeys**, at Champlain Place in Dieppe;
- **Co-op**, located in Dieppe;
- **Atlantic Superstore**, Main Street in Moncton.

## 3. Results and comments

### A. Cost of the nutritious food basket for 67 items purchased in three food outlets in November 2013

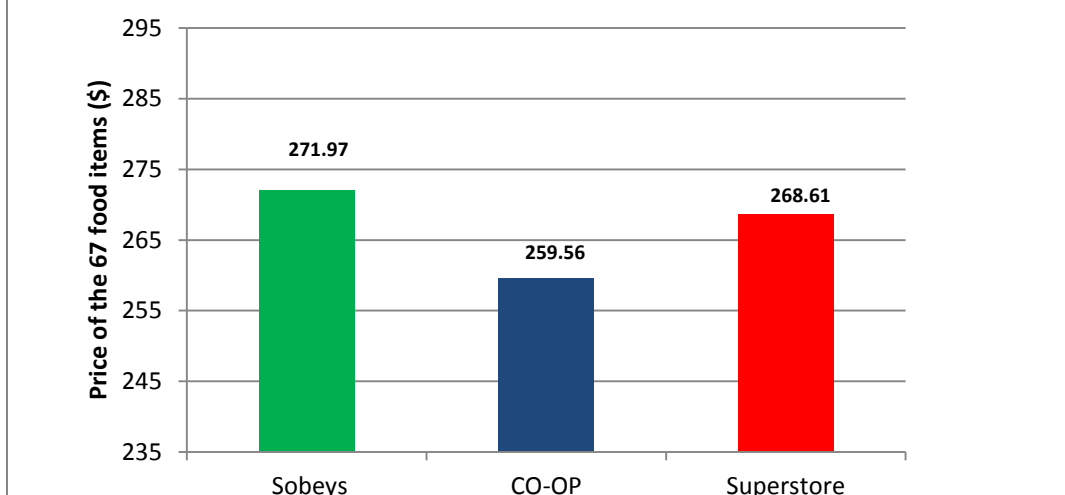
According to our survey, the price of a food basket including 67 food items was less at Co-op (\$259.56). Atlantic Superstore follows (\$268.61) and Sobeys is last (271.97) (See Figure 1).

1- Co-op: \$259.56  
2- Atlantic Superstore: \$268.61  
3- Sobeys: \$271.97

<sup>2</sup> Members of the CFSJ: Jean-Claude Basque, Joannie LeBlanc, Johanne Petitpas, Suzanne Dubé, Lise Rodrigue and Paul Thériault.

<sup>3</sup> Health Canada. National Nutritious Food Basket, see: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/basket-panier/index-eng.php>.

**Figure 1 - Cost of a nutritious food basket of 67 items purchased in three food outlets in November 2013**



## B. Food items on sale and possible savings

Based on the 67 food items included in Health Canada’s Nutritious Food Basket, the number of food items on sale varies from one food store to another, and from week to week.

As illustrated in the box below, the average number of food items on sale during November 2013 was 28 at Co-op, 24 at Sobeys, and 17 at Atlantic Superstore.

Table 1 shows the number of food items on sale during the four weeks of November. Co-op had the most food items from *Canada’s Food Guide* on sale during the month of November. It had 25 items on sale at the beginning of the month and 29 during the last week. Sobeys follows closely with 24 items at the beginning of the month and 25 at the end. Superstore comes last with only 16 the first week and 18 the fourth week.

### Monthly average of food items on sale

Co-op: 28  
Sobeys: 24  
Atlantic Superstore: 17

**Table 1 - Number of food items on sale in November 2013**

Store	Nov. 7	Nov. 14	Nov. 21	Nov. 28	Weekly average
Sobeys	24	27	21	25	24
Co-op	25	29	27	29	28
Atlantic Superstore	16	17	15	18	17
Average	22	24	21	24	23

## C. Money saved by consumers

To draw a picture of the money saved by shopping at different stores, we calculated, for each food item, the difference between the regular price and the sale price and determined the monthly savings. Table 2 shows that by shopping at Co-op in November 2013, consumers saved more money (\$107.77). Sobeys follows (\$96,91) and Superstore is far behind (\$72.13).

### Monthly savings

Co-op: \$107.77 \$

Sobeys: \$96.91 \$

Atlantic Superstore: \$72.13 \$

**Table 2 - Weekly and monthly savings – November 2013**

Week	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Nov. 7	\$30.20	\$34.20	\$17.70
Nov. 14	\$28.08	\$26.88	\$15.43
Nov. 21	\$16.05	\$22.59	\$17.56
Nov. 28	\$22.58	\$24.10	\$21.44
<b>Monthly total</b>	<b>\$96.91</b>	<b>\$107.77</b>	<b>\$72.13</b>

The best savings can be found at Co-op and Sobeys the first week of the month while they can be found the last week of the month at Atlantic Superstore.

Table 1 shows a higher number of food items on sale during the last week, except at Sobeys. However, a closer analysis of Table 2 shows a decrease in money saved at Sobeys and Co-op when the end of the month approaches. At Sobeys, we observe a 50% decrease between the first and third week and a slight increase on week four. At Co-op, there is a drop for the first three weeks and a small increase of \$1.51 the last week. As for Atlantic Superstore, the three first weeks are similar with a slight increase of \$3.44 the last week.

*These observations are important when we know that pension and welfare cheques are issued during the last week of the month. According to our data, and contrary to popular belief, food stores do not voluntarily target the last week of the month to lower the number of articles on sale. Quite the opposite, there were more food items on sale at the end of the month. However, the savings are not as important as at the beginning of the month.*

## D. Sales distribution in relation to the product category

We looked at the frequency of sales for six food groups: milk and dairy products, meat, poultry and fish, vegetables, fruits, fats and oils, and cereal products. Results are shown in Tables 3a to 3f and Annex 3.

### 1. Milk and dairy products

Dairy products are an important source of high-value proteins for our body. They are, among other things, an important source of calcium, mineral particularly essential for children and seniors. Milk, three kinds of cheese and yogurt are included in this group.

The number of dairy products on sale in a month varied from 2 to 3 at Sobeys, from 0 to 3 at Co-op and there was only one at Atlantic Superstore. Money saved at Sobeys was more than twice the amount saved at the two other stores. The number of dairy products on sale, approximately 2 out of 5, was rather low.

**Table 3a - Number of dairy products on sale during the month**

Store	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Number of items	2 to 3	0 to 3	1
Money saved	\$12.50	\$5.37	\$3.96

### 2. Meat, poultry and fish

These foods contain high-quality proteins our body needs to build muscles and bone. There are, in this category, 14 products that meet the requirements of *Canada's Food Guide*.

Seven (7) to 11 items were on sale every week at Co-op, 2 to 8 at Sobeys, and 4 to 6 at Atlantic Superstore. Co-op had the most important rebates, followed by Atlantic Superstore then by Sobeys. We observed a rather high number of protein-rich foods on sale.

**Table 3b - Number of meat, poultry and fish items on sale during the month**

Store	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Number of items	2 to 8	7 to 11	4 to 6
Money saved	\$20.64	\$44.45	\$34.11

### 3. Vegetables

Vegetables are a high source of fiber, vitamins and minerals, essential nutrients for the body. Twenty vegetables are recommended to meet the requirements of *Canada's Food Guide*. Table 3c illustrates the number of vegetables on sale during the month.

Table 3c - Number of vegetables on sale during the month

Store	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Number of items	4 to 8	5 to 13	1 to 4
Money saved	\$23.35	\$23.65	\$8.10

At Sobeys, the number of vegetables on sale varied from 4 to 8, depending on the week. It varied from 5 to 13 at Co-op and from 1 to 4 at Atlantic Superstore. Sobeys and Co-op offered a rather similar number of specials but Atlantic Superstore had very few specials in regard to vegetables.

**Important fact:** If we remove frozen and canned vegetables (beans, mixed vegetables, peas, corn and tomatoes) from the list of vegetables on sale, the picture is revealing. **In November 2013, the three store outlets did not offer much rebates on fresh vegetables. Co-op was offering, for one week only, a little more than Sobeys but for Atlantic Superstore, there was only one week where three vegetables were on sale and another week, two.** Given the focus on the nutritious value of fresh vegetables, it would be advisable to offer more vegetables at an affordable price.

### 4. Fruits

Eleven (11) different fruits are featured in *Canada's Food Guide*. As shown in Table 3d, the number of fruits on sale at Sobeys varied from 5 to 6 a month. At Co-op and Atlantic Superstore it varied from 2 to 5 and from 2 to 4 respectively. Sobeys ranked first in terms of money saved. It is followed by Co-op and, again, Atlantic Superstore is far behind.

Table 3d - Number of fruits on sale during the month

Store	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Number of items	5 to 6	2 to 5	2 to 4
Money saved	\$20.03	\$12.80	\$6.35

Let us highlight that among the 11 fruits on the list, six were fresh products (apples, bananas, oranges, pears, raisins and melons). All stores had a bad score. Sobeys had generally 2 to 3 fresh fruits on sale; Co-op and Atlantic Superstore has only one for the whole month.

## 5. Fats and oils

Fats and oils provide the calories and fatty acids we need and help the absorption of certain vitamins. In this category, *Canada's Food Guide* lists four different items: vegetable oil, non-hydrogenated margarine, mayonnaise and salad dressing.

As illustrated in Table 3e, the number of items of this category which were on sale at Sobeys varied from 1 to 2 per month, from 1 to 3 at Co-op and there was only one at Atlantic Superstore. Sobeys is still in first place in relation to savings for this food group.

**Table 3e - Number of fat and oil items on sale during the month**

Store	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Number of items	1 to 2	1 to 3	1
Money saved	\$8.10	\$6.40	\$1.40

## 6. Cereal products

Grain products are the main source of calories and fiber. They provide the energy our body needs. *Canada's Food Guide* lists 13 elements in this category.

Table 3f shows that the number of cereal products on sale at Sobeys and Atlantic Superstore varied from 3 to 5 and, at Co-op, it varied from 2 to 5. Savings at Atlantic Superstore (\$18.30) were more important than at Co-op (\$15.10) Sobeys (\$12.29). The three stores did not seem to put an emphasis on this food group when advertising sales.

**Table 3f - Cereal products on sale during the month**

Store	Sobeys	Co-op	Atlantic Superstore
Number of items	3 à 5	2 à 5	3 à 5
Money saved	\$12.29	\$15.10	\$18.30



## E. Price of food for some households

There are near 100 000 people in N.B. who live under the poverty line. What it costs to eat well is a constant concern for them and their family.

Low-income workers only earn \$10 an hour. Their salary is not indexed to the cost of living and there has not been any salary increase in 2013.

The near 40 000 people relying on welfare to survive lost, in five years, near 9% of their purchasing power. It's only during the fall of 2013 that the welfare rate increased but the increase does not cover the losses.

And what can we say about seniors who get the Guaranteed Income Supplement, about professional artists or post-secondary students living in poverty? It is very difficult for these people to pay for nutritious food.

**As shown in Appendix 1, the situation of people living in poverty did not improve. And increasing number of people in N.B. must rely on food banks if they don't want to go to bed hungry.**

With the tool developed by Health Canada, we can calculate the monthly cost of a basic nutritious diet for families of different sizes or composition. Based on the data gathered in November 2013 from 12 visits to Greater Moncton food outlets, Table 4 illustrates the monthly cost of a nutritious diet for 16 different age groups.

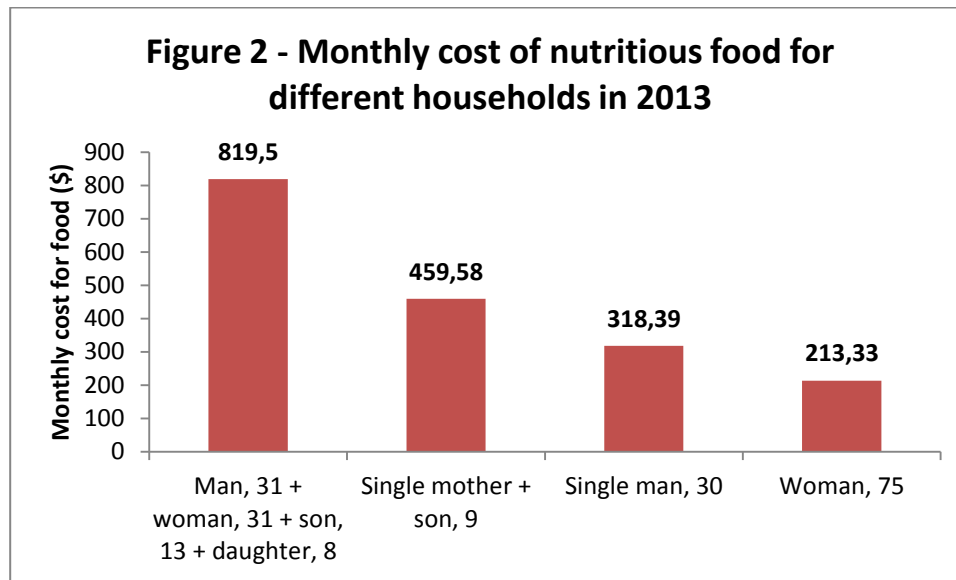
**Table 4 - Average monthly cost for food in 2013 in the Greater Moncton, based on *Canada's Food Guide*, by age and sex**

Sex	Age (years)	Monthly cost (\$)		Sex	Age (years)	Monthly cost (\$)
Boy	2-3	121.98		Girl	2-3	119.85
	4-8	156.92			4-8	152.68
	9-13	205.20			9-13	176.92
	14-18	284.05			14-18	210.57
Man	19-30	275.13		Woman	19-30	215.29
	31-50	249.00			31-50	212.60
	51-70	239.97			51-70	189.78
	71+	238.11			71+	185.50

When families are smaller, it generally costs more to eat. That is why Health Canada recommends taking into account the household size and adjusting the food cost accordingly:

- One-person household: multiply by 1.15
- Two-person household: multiply by 1.10
- Three-person household: multiply by 1.05
- Four-person household: no change

To better understand the challenge of certain groups, we calculated the monthly food cost for a family of four (31-year-old man, 31-year-old woman, 13-year-old son, and 8-year-old daughter), a single mother with a 9-year-old son, a single man, and a 75-year-old woman (Figure 2).



As we can see, eating well on a small salary, or on a low fixed income, skims off an important percentage of the monthly revenue.

- ✓ **Family of four: \$819.50 per month.** If this family relies on only one source of revenue coming from a minimum salary of \$1 720 a month, it will have to spend **48 % of its revenue in order to eat healthy.**
- ✓ **Single mother with a 9-year-old son: \$459.58 per month.** If this family is on welfare, its revenue will be \$945 and will have to spend **49% of its revenue in order to eat healthy.**
- ✓ **Single man: \$318.39 per month.** If this man is on welfare, his revenue consists of \$537 a month and he will have to spend **59% of its revenue in order to eat healthy.**
- ✓ **75-year-old woman: \$213.33 per month.** If this woman only gets Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, her revenue is \$1 286.51 a month. She will have to spend **17 % of her revenue in order to eat healthy.**

## Conclusion

In November 2013, the Common Front for Social Justice (CFSJ) examined the price of 67 food items included in Health Canada's Nutritious Food Basket. During the whole month of November, the survey team recorded the price of the food items in three Greater Moncton food outlets, namely Sobeys, Co-op and Atlantic Superstore. Prices were recorded every Thursdays of the month, day when the weekly sales start.

According to our survey, Co-op is where the nutritious food basket is less expensive. Atlantic Superstore follows and Sobeys comes in last.

The number of food items on sale was rather similar at Sobeys and Co-op but clearly inferior at Atlantic Superstore. At Sobeys and Co-op there were more food items on sale at the beginning of the month than at Atlantic Superstore. Possible monthly savings were higher at Co-op, then at Sobeys, but Atlantic Superstore ranks last.

Low-income or fixed income individuals and families must spend an important percentage of their revenue in order to eat properly.

The Common Front for Social Justice believes the results of this survey, carried out in the Greater Moncton area, can be applied to the whole province of N.B., since the three food outlets are located in the whole province.

## Recommendations

Given the results of the food price survey carried out by the CFSJ in November 2013, and given its recent position on social and economic issues, the CFSJ makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Department of Social Development implements, immediately, a Food Supplement Program of \$50 per month per household for social assistance recipients.
2. That the Department of Social Development ask for more money in the next provincial budget in order to substantially increase the basic social assistance rate for all recipients.
3. That the Department of Social Development continue to work on making changes to policies in order to allow welfare recipients to keep a greater proportion of their earned income when they are working.
4. That the Department of Social Development increase social assistance rates for persons with disabilities and revise the eligibility requirements.
5. That the Department of Social Development publish the 2010 NB Food Banks report, and implements the recommendations aimed at reducing food insecurity.
6. That the Human Rights Commissioner, in cooperation with other provincial Departments, develop an awareness campaign on the need to reduce poverty (the CFSJ suggests a campaign aimed at dispelling myths about poor people), which is essential to the success of a poverty reduction strategy.

7. That the minister of Finance raise personal income tax for high-income individuals, as recommended by the CFSJ in January 2012, in order to have more funds available for people living in poverty and, consequently, reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.
8. That the Minimum Wage Commission recommend a gradual increase of the current minimum salary, as well as wage indexation, so workers can maintain their purchasing power.
9. That the three large food outlets (Atlantic Superstore, Sobeys and Co-op) develop a promotional policy targeting healthy eating in their flyers; that nutritious foods be advertised and on sale more often.
10. That the three large food outlets make greater effort to purchase New Brunswick or Maritimes products in order to help local farmers and local economies.

## Appendix 1

### Food banks in New Brunswick: 2008-2013

Hunger Count – highlights	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Difference
Number of people assisted by food banks	15,638	17,889	18,517	18,539	19,524	19,989	+ 4,351
% assisted who are under 18 years of age	33.2%	33.8%	34.3 %	34.4%	32.0%	33.2%	
Households assisted by food banks	7,060	7,710	8,440	8,160	8,975	9,376	+ 2,316
% Provincial population assisted	2.09%	2.39%	2.46%	2.46%	2.58%	2.65%	+0.56%

Source :<http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/FoodBanks/MediaLibrary/HungerCount/HungerCount2013.pdf>

**Appendix 2: Average prices of food items by store, and total average of food item prices for items in the nutritious basket, November 2013 (Greater Moncton)**

	Sobeys	CO-OP	Atlantic Superstore	Average
<b>MILK &amp; MILK ALTERNATIVES</b>				
Milk, partly skimmed, 2% M.F.	6.51	6.52	6.52	6.52
Cheese, processed food, cheddar, slices	3.74	4.92	4.14	4.27
Cheese, mozzarella, partially skim	4.99	3.87	3.92	4.26
Cheese, cheddar	4.06	3.92	3.54	3.84
Yogourt, fruit bottom, 1% to 2% M.F.	3.80	4.02	3.20	3.67
<b>MEAT, POULTRY AND FISH</b>				
Egg, chicken	3.17	3.29	3.19	3.22
Chicken, legs	8.31	7.84	8.52	8.22
Ham, sliced, regular (approximately 11% fat)	3.12	1.91	2.84	2.62
Beef, hip, inside (top) round roast	12.10	9.80	10.56	10.82
Beef, hip, inside (top) round steak	12.92	10.35	9.83	11.03
Beef, ground, lean	9.85	9.91	7.97	9.24
Pork, loin, centre chop, bone-in	9.90	9.27	10.84	10.00
Fish (sole, haddock, pollock, halibut), frozen	5.32	4.65	5.72	5.23
Beans, baked, canned in tomato sauce	1.18	0.94	0.97	1.03
Tuna, light, canned in water	1.57	1.47	1.25	1.43
Salmon, chum (keta), canned	2.29	2.03	2.09	2.14
Peanut butter, smooth type	3.47	2.68	3.99	3.38
Peanuts, dry roasted	4.85	4.66	5.20	4.90
Lentils, dry	1.55	1.87	2.01	1.81
<b>VEGETABLES AND FRUITS</b>				
Beans, snap (Italian, green or yellow), frozen	3.15	3.37	3.99	3.50
Vegetables, mixed, frozen	2.49	2.94	3.99	3.14
Peas, green, frozen	3.49	3.09	3.99	3.52
Orange juice, frozen concentrate	1.76	1.74	1.87	1.79
Strawberry, frozen, unsweetened	3.99	4.77	4.74	4.50
Lettuce, cos or romaine	4.98	5.93	7.32	6.08
Mushroom, raw	11.19	10.72	9.91	10.60
Lettuce, iceberg	4.15	3.40	3.53	3.69
Carrot, raw	3.19	1.47	1.98	2.21
Onion, raw	3.11	1.47	1.98	2.18
Tomato, red, raw	4.77	4.28	4.00	4.35
Potato, white, raw	4.99	5.37	4.99	5.12
Sweet potato, raw	3.36	3.17	3.62	3.38
Cabbage, raw	1.59	1.36	1.74	1.56
Rutabaga (turnip), raw	1.52	1.36	1.58	1.48
Broccoli, raw	6.15	4.79	4.47	5.14
Cucumber, raw	2.89	2.99	2.49	2.79
Pepper, sweet, green, raw	3.95	4.55	5.11	4.54
Celery, raw	3.43	2.96	3.32	3.24
Apple, raw	2.43	2.95	3.95	3.11
Banana, raw	1.74	1.74	1.74	1.74
Oranges, all commercial varieties, raw	3.62	2.83	3.42	3.29
Pear, raw	4.02	4.04	3.56	3.87
Grape, red or green, raw	5.38	6.48	6.32	6.06
Melon, cantaloupe, raw	3.66	3.23	3.16	3.35
Apple juice, canned or bottled, added vitamin	1.70	2.43	1.58	1.90
Peach, canned halves or slices, juice pack	2.09	1.39	1.79	1.76
Corn, canned vacuum packed	1.12	1.14	1.27	1.18
Tomato, canned, whole	1.11	1.22	1.34	1.22
Vegetable juice cocktail	2.99	3.22	2.73	2.98
Raisin, seedless (sultana)	6.87	4.69	5.79	5.78
<b>FATS AND OILS</b>				
Vegetable oil, canola	7.97	6.61	7.77	7.45
Salad dressing, mayonnaise type	3.22	3.59	3.49	3.43
Salad dressing, italian, regular	3.58	5.10	3.58	4.09
Margarine, tub, non-hydrogenated	3.37	3.54	3.49	3.47
<b>WHOLE GRAIN PRODUCTS</b>				
Cereal, bran flakes with raisins	4.01	5.84	5.16	5.00
Cereal, oats, quick cooking	2.36	2.39	2.72	2.49
Cereal, toasted oats - Os	3.25	3.37	4.52	3.71
Cracker, saltine, unsalted top	2.07	2.70	2.47	2.41
Pasta, spaghetti, enriched	1.99	1.99	1.85	1.94
Grains, wheat flour, whole-grain	4.72	3.99	4.06	4.26
White flour, all-purpose	4.24	3.99	4.15	4.13
Rice, white, long-grain, parboiled	2.99	2.77	3.99	3.25
Cookies, plain (arrowroot, social tea)	3.20	3.17	2.99	3.12
Roll, hamburger	2.50	3.29	3.09	2.96
Bread, white	3.49	2.87	2.90	3.09
Bread, whole wheat	3.37	2.87	2.38	2.87
Bread, pita, whole-wheat	2.15	2.56	2.49	2.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>271.97</b>	<b>259.56</b>	<b>268.61</b>	<b>266.71</b>

