



660 Speedvale Ave. W.,  
Suite 302  
Guelph, ON N1K 1E5  
(519) 837-1326  
info@farmfoodcare.org  
[www.FarmFoodCareON.org](http://www.FarmFoodCareON.org)  
@FarmFoodCareON

## **Food Freedom Day and what it means for Canadians**

*By Crispin Colvin, Chair, Farm & Food Care Ontario*

This year, Food Freedom Day again falls on February 9, 2024. Coined and calculated by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Food Freedom Day marks the date the average Canadian will have earned enough income to cover the cost of their yearly grocery bill.

The day is calculated by taking Canadians' total retail expenditure on food and beverages and dividing it by the total Canadian household disposable income to create a percentage. Food Freedom Day occurs when that percentage of the year is reached. It also serves as an annual reminder that Canadians are fortunate to have access to an abundance of fresh, healthy, safe and affordable food choices.

The 2024 date remains unchanged from 2023, which will likely surprise many, especially in light of rising food prices and inflation. As a result, CFA has acknowledged that as Food Freedom Day is calculated using averages, it cannot accurately represent the experiences of all Canadians. CFA has begun to look more extensively into how different income levels are impacted by food prices.

The CFA research shows a growing disparity between Canadians with different income brackets. Canadians in low-income households spend a significantly higher percentage (28 per cent) of their disposable income on food (up from 23 per cent in 2023), whereas Canadians in high-income households can spend as little as five per cent (down from 5.2 per cent in 2023). On average, Canadians spend about nine per cent of their household income on food—one of the lowest percentages in the world.

While the reality for many Canadians is that rising food prices have negatively impacted their food budget, there are many other factors to consider when reflecting on Canada's current food system.

It is important to acknowledge that Canada is only now recovering from a national health and supply chain crisis caused by COVID-19, significantly impacting food availability and affordability. Expenses within the supply chain have increased, and labour shortages have become a prominent concern nationwide. While food systems worldwide face extreme challenges, it is important to focus on the resiliency and reliability of local food. Canadians can feel reassured, knowing that their usual food purchases are readily available.

This assurance speaks to the vital role all members of the food supply system across Canada are playing to make sure we can buy the food we need and want when we need and want it. That's because our farmers, suppliers, truckers, processors, retailers and everyone else between production and our plates are working collectively, taking all the necessary precautions so that food remains a constant.

As Canadians, we have access to a highly diverse food system. We can choose between a myriad of different types of food but also different methods for producing food. What Canadians select to add to their carts can significantly impact and stretch budgets.

### Tips to stretch grocery budgets:

- Plan your weekly meals; the time it takes to figure out what you'll be eating through the week is a giant step towards diminishing food waste and saving yourself some money.
- Buy in season, local produce. You are supporting your local farmers and getting the freshest possible produce.
- Choose long lasting veggies and fruits.
- Cook once and eat twice – re-inventing one meal into a second meal the next day
- Shop your pantry, fridge and freezer.
- Check for specials at your grocery store. Plan your weekly meals around them and stock up on staples that are on sale that you eat on a regular basis.
- Consider batch cooking to take advantage of lower prices when items are purchased in bulk; meals can be frozen or stored to be eaten later.
- Buy whole foods (i.e. chicken, beets, celery etc.) and then research online resources on how to use everything.
- Keep veggie scraps and leftover meat (beef bones, chicken or turkey scraps) in the freezer to make soup.
- Blend vegetables into your meals to stretch your ingredients and add flavour.
- Consider frozen options; frozen fruits, veggies and meats have just as much nutritional value as fresh.
- Don't discount the discount rack. You can always freeze some of these products to use at a later date.

While Food Freedom Day provides a great benchmark for measuring how income and food prices impact Canadians, Canadian food and farming is so much more than just averages.

For more information on Canadian food and how it is produced, visit: [realdirtontfarming.ca](http://realdirtontfarming.ca). *The Real Dirt on Farming* is a national guide to food & farming in Canada to help Canadians make informed choices.

To hear the stories of Canadians responsible for producing your food, check out @FacesBehindFood on Instagram and Facebook.

### Source

Canadian Federation of Agriculture  
Canadian Food Focus

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For further information:

Farm & Food Care Ontario is a coalition of farmers, agriculture and food partners proactively working together to ensure public trust and confidence in food and farming. Farm & Food Care provides a coordinated approach and credible information on food and farming in Ontario. For more information visit [www.FarmFoodCareON.org](http://www.FarmFoodCareON.org)

Christa Ormiston, Communications Manager, 519-837-1326, extension 221; (cell) 519-766-5561; [christa@farmfoodcare.org](mailto:christa@farmfoodcare.org)