

NUTR 390 - LETTUCE TALK SAVINGS IN THE KITCHEN

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FEEDBACK FROM THE MARCH 12 THE WHOLE U WEBINAR

Icebreaker: The goal here is to pick one of these questions and discuss them with friends and family.

What item do you refuse to buy from a different brand? And why are you loyal to them?

What food or beverage products are your "this makes life worth living," regardless of the cost?

Using the "Claude" AI platform, I asked it to summarize both of the break-out room questions into a comprehensive list of best past practices and current practices. And I included the original responses and the chat responses at the bottom of the AI reorganized list.

Strategic Shopping

Family of Origin Practices:

- Coupons and bottle deposit returns to fund grocery shopping
- Wait till certain items were on sale
- Buy store brands/"Yellow Label" products
- Big monthly shopping trips with weekly smaller shops for produce
- Comparing per ounce/lb price on all items
- Shopping at specialized locations (military base, Costco, Trader Joe's, Winco)
- Using Consumer Reports for price analysis (free from public libraries)

Current Practices:

- Shop at outlet stores first (Grocery Outlet, Saar's, Winco)
- Shop at cheaper stores first, then more expensive stores (Safeway/Whole Foods)
- Use store flyers for discounts
- Watch for sales and stock up when possible
- Shop at bulk stores and co-ops (PCC, Winco, Saar's, Cash & Carry, Town and Country)
- Shop at stores where you can purchase smaller amounts of produce
- Use Fred Meyer buyer card for personalized coupons or other store loyalty programs
- Buy spices in bulk to keep costs down and prevent waste
- Shop around for specific brand preferences

Additional Ideas:

- Use cashback apps and browser extensions for online grocery orders
- Shop seasonal produce when prices are lowest
- Check clearance sections for marked-down items near expiration
- Shop at closing time for bakery/deli markdowns
- Price match between competing stores when policies allow
- Buy holiday-themed items after the holiday at steep discounts
- Create a price comparison spreadsheet for regularly purchased items

Food Storage & Preservation

Family of Origin Practices:

- Buy in bulk, divide and freeze
- Chest deep freezer for preserving/stocking up
- Freezing foods before they go bad
- Home gardens and yearly preservation/canning practices, sharing resources with neighbors, church groups, and community organizations
- Use produce scraps to freeze and make soup stock
- Grow and dry soft neck garlic for storage

Current Practices:

- Freeze vegetable scraps for homemade broth
- Freeze cheese/parmesan rinds for soup flavor
- Freeze grated zucchini in portioned amounts
- Save and freeze Costco chicken carcasses for broth
- Double recipes and freeze half for later meals

Additional Ideas:

- Vacuum sealing to extend freezer life and prevent freezer burn
- Dehydrating fruits and vegetables when in season
- Fermenting vegetables (kimchi, sauerkraut) for long-lasting preserved foods
- Canning jams and preserves when fruit is abundant and cheap
- Blanching vegetables before freezing to maintain quality
- Creating a freezer inventory to prevent forgotten items
- Properly storing pantry items (rice, beans, pasta) in airtight containers to prevent waste
- Using ice cube trays to freeze small portions of herbs, stock, or wine for cooking

Meal Planning & Management

Family of Origin Practices:

- Menu planning - list on the refrigerator for the week
- Leftover meal nights
- Calculating cost per meal of favorite dinners
- Dinner supplements such as casserole/spam/cottage cheese + fruit

Current Practices:

- Save leftover foods which might go bad, freeze, create meal options using those
- Revisit old cookbooks for new ideas
- One-pot meals (casseroles, stews, etc.) that are adaptable
- Use AI for weekly meal planning that utilizes similar ingredients and leftovers
- Use What's For Dinner app to input leftovers/expiring ingredients for recipe ideas
- Use ramen as a base with nutritious add-ins (peas, corn, peanuts, eggs, etc.)
- Use quinoa as a protein-rich base for various dishes

Additional Ideas:

- "Cook once, eat twice" - prepare extra portions to repurpose in different meals
- Theme nights (like "Meatless Monday") to structure affordable cooking
- Batch cooking and freezing portions for quick future meals
- Creating a price book to track best prices for common items
- Planning meals around what's already in your pantry/freezer before shopping
- Building meals around affordable protein sources
- Creating a rotating meal schedule to simplify planning
- "Stretch" expensive ingredients by combining with more affordable ones

Home Production

Family of Origin Practices:

- Grow fresh herbs (they're expensive in stores)
- Herb garden, make pesto, freeze in ice cube trays for year-round use
- Buy spices at ethnic food markets

Current Practices:

- Grow lettuce (described as "easy as growing weeds")
- Regrow celery and green onions from ends with roots
- Make homemade vegetable broth from scraps

Additional Ideas:

- Container gardening for small spaces to grow high-value produce
- Sprouting seeds for fresh greens year-round - learn about how to do this safely
- Making your own bread, yogurt, or other staples
- Starting plants from seeds rather than buying seedlings
- Making your own cleaning products from basic ingredients
- Growing microgreens on windowsills
- Using vertical gardening techniques to maximize small spaces
- Indoor herb gardens for year-round fresh herbs

Alternative Food Sources

Family of Origin Practices:

- Canned whole chicken (cheap in the 1950s)
- Rarely eating out
- Home gardens for fresh produce

Current Practices:

- Buying in bulk and sharing among friends/community members
- Using rotisserie chicken carcasses for stock (getting multiple meals from one purchase)

Additional Ideas:

- Community gardens or garden sharing
- Food co-ops for bulk buying at reduced prices
- "Ugly" produce subscription services
- Foraging for seasonal edibles (if knowledgeable about safe plants)
- Joining CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs
- Participating in seed/plant exchanges
- Exploring international grocery stores for some different affordable alternatives
- Food swaps with neighbors or friends

Waste Reduction Strategies

Current Practices:

- Reuse disposable items if still viable
- Use recyclable grocery bags instead of paying for bags
- Buy reusable bags (expensive initially but save money over time)
- Shop at stores where you can purchase smaller amounts of produce (to prevent waste)
- Use Recology program for recycling ideas

Additional Ideas:

- Composting food scraps to enrich garden soil
- Regrowing vegetables from scraps (like the green onion example)
- Using stale bread for breadcrumbs, croutons or bread pudding
- Keeping a "must use" bin in the refrigerator for items approaching expiration
- Learning proper food storage techniques to extend freshness
- Creating "kitchen sink" meals to use up odds and ends
- Preserving herbs by drying or freezing when they're abundant
- Using silicone storage bags and beeswax wraps instead of disposable options

Financial Planning for Food

Family of Origin Practices:

- Calculating cost per meal of favorite dinners
- Careful shopping and planning

Current Practices:

- Using the Yuka app to scan packaged foods (saves money by avoiding unhealthy processed items)
- What's For Dinner app for using leftovers/expiring ingredients
- Using AI to create budget-friendly meal plans
- Reference "The Everlasting Meal" by Tamar Adler for leftover meal ideas

Additional Ideas:

- Setting a realistic food budget based on family size and needs
- Tracking grocery spending to identify patterns and opportunities

- Building a pantry gradually during sales rather than all at once
- Creating a rotating stockpile of shelf-stable staples
- Setting aside a portion of the budget for stocking up on significant sales
- Planning for seasonal price fluctuations
- Evaluating whether memberships (like Costco) actually save money for your family
- Using expense tracking apps specifically for grocery spending
- Grocery rebate apps (Ibotta, Checkout 51, Fetch Rewards)
- Price comparison websites and apps
- Digital coupon services connected to store loyalty accounts
- Meal planning apps that integrate with grocery store sales
- Library resources for cookbooks and food education
- Food waste tracking apps to identify spending patterns
- Local community resources (food banks, community fridges, produce exchanges)

Below are the actual webinar break-out room prompts and participant's answers:

1. **What was a cost saving measure that your family of origin practiced? Include it here or in the chat when we go back to the main room.**
 - To canned whole chicken which was very cheap in the 1950's awful flavor
 - Buy in bulk, divide and freeze
 - We almost never ate out, shopped on military base
 - Grow fresh herbs (they're expensive in the stores)
 - Use your produce scraps to freeze and then use them to make soup stock (saves waste)
 - Coupons.
 - Wait till certain items were on sale.
 - "Yellow Label" products
 - Years ago we calculated the cost of a single meal of all of our favorite dinners (i.e. add up the cost all of the ingredients and divided by the number of meals it makes for your family). We discovered the meals we enjoyed were actually only about \$1-2 each. It was an eye opening practice to realize expensive home cooked meals were not necessarily the ones we liked to eat.
 - Coupons and bottle deposit returns to fund grocery shopping; home gardens and yearly preservation/canning practices; dinner supplements such as casserole/spam/cottage cheese + fruit;
 - Buy store brands
 - Cut coupon
 - Big monthly shopping trips w/ weekly smaller shops for produce
 - Coupon cutting
 - Menu planning - list on the refrigerator for the week
 - Leftover nights
 - Freezing foods before they go bad
 - Herb garden, make pesto, use year round, ice cube
 - Grow your own garlic - dry and store
 - Buy spices at ethnic food markets - better spices for Mexican and Indian food.
 - Careful shopping and planning, comparing per ounce/lb price on all items, mostly shop at Costco and Trader Joes which both are often less overall. Winco is also good but farther from home. Analysis of pricing by store is in Consumer Reports (which is free from Seattle Public Library).
 - We bought a chest deep freezer several years ago and it pays for itself when you can preserve/stock up—if you have space. Much better than freezer burned things from standard freezer.
2. **What is a current cost savings practice that you use today, either at the grocery store, or in the kitchen? Feel free to add as many as you want.**
 - Reuse disposable items if still viable.

- I grow a lot of lettuce. It is like growing weeds, so easy to do.
- I take the ends of my green onions with the roots and toss them in my garden bed. They regrow easily.
- Shop at the cheap stores first like Grocery Outlet, then the bigger expensive stores like Safeway/WholeFoods next so you can stock up on items that are randomly on sale, but still get everything you need for a nice meal.
- Shop at outlet stores, buy in bulk - PCC, Saar's, Winco (employee owned), co-op grocery stores, Grocery Outlet, Town and Country
- Save leftover foods which might go bad, freeze, create a meal option using those
- Shop around for specific brand preferences
- Buying in bulk and sharing among friends/community members
- Started using the store flyers for discounts, shopping at Grocery Outlet, Traders Joe's, Saar's
- Watching for sales and stocking up when you can
- Shop at Winco, Grocery Outlet, Cash & Carry, Town and Country
- Shopping at stores where you can purchase a smaller amount of produce, say a couple stalks of celery vs a whole bunch. Live by myself, can't eat the whole thing of produce before it goes bad.
- Revisit old cookbooks for new ideas
- One-pot meals (casseroles, stews, etc) that are adaptable
- Double recipes and freeze half for a later meal - helps to not have to order out
- Freeze veggie scraps and then boil to make your own vegetable broth.
- Freeze cheese/parmesan rinds - which add flavor to soups.
- Throw Costco chicken carcass in crock pot with frozen veggies scraps to make broth
- Use Yuka app to scan packaged foods in stores. After I found out the number of hazardous ingredients those foods contain and what they do to my body, I stopped buying those and saved so much money.
- I use AI (like ChatGPT) to input my dietary restrictions and focus on low cost foods and have it prepare a weekly meal plan that will use similar ingredients and decrease costs and space requirements. And the plan uses the leftovers for the next day's menus. Here is a great article on this...
<https://www.foodandwine.com/chatgpt-grocery-list-8782680>
- Ramen is a great base and the add-ins make it more nourishing and delicious. Add-ins I like are peas, corn, peanuts, eggs, lemon grass, green onions, etc.
- Use the carcass of rotisserie chickens and use them to make chicken broth/stock, freeze it, and use it later.
- Freeze grated zucchini in 1 - 2 cup portions and then thaw and add to soups, spaghetti sauce, egg pancakes, etc.
- Keep and freeze all vegetable trimmings and when the gallon ziploc is full you can use it to make vegetable broth or add it to meat and make a punched up flavored stock.
- I buy spices in bulk to keep those costs down and not have a large quantity that goes bad.
- I have bought reusable bags - they are expensive but worth it after time.
- Quinoa is a complete protein and makes a great base grain for warm or cold dishes. Add-ins can include spinach, olives (pitted), caramelized onions, golden raisins, grated carrots, canned beans, etc.
- Use recyclable grocery bags instead of getting charged for each bag at check-out.
- Fred Meyer sends you coupons based on your prior buying history if you get their buyer card.
- What's For Dinner app - that you can input leftovers or expiring ingredients and it gives you recipe ideas. Also check out the cookbook called "The Everlasting Meal" by Tamar Adler.
- Here is a great program (in Washington and King County) to help people consider more recycling ideas:
<https://www.recology.com/about-us/mission-vision/>