

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Stock up and plan for snow day lunches

My children always eat their breakfast and lunch at school. Money is tight, and we don't always have extra food on hand, which is a problem when school is canceled at the last minute because of the weather. I don't want my children to go hungry just because school is closed. Any ideas?

First, you're not alone. During last year's severe winter, many officials voiced concern about whether some students would have enough to eat at home when schools closed due to weather.

And now, a new national study by the Southern Education Foundation found that 51 percent of children in the nation's public schools, pre-kindergarten through high school, were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches in 2013. This is the first time in recent history that a majority of students in public schools come from low-income families.

When money is so tight that a family has to make hard choices between paying for food or other necessities, it's a significant challenge to plan ahead for something like meals for snow days. Good for you for thinking of this.

Here are some ideas for keeping an emergency stash of relatively inexpensive foods on hand:

- **Dry beans.** Ounce for ounce, dry beans are a bargain. The website "The Simple Dollar" (thesimpledollar.com) recently did a cost comparison, which found that a one-pound bag of dried beans yielded eight cups of cooked beans at an average cost of \$1.99, while a can of cooked beans, at an average cost of \$1.19, yielded just two cups. If you've never used dried beans, you need to be aware that they



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take time to prepare — at least an hour using a "quick-soak" method. The Bean Institute offers step-by-step instructions at beaninstitute.com/recipes/cooking-with-dry-beans. You'll also likely want to experiment with herbs, spices and other flavorings to add to the cooked beans. It's recommended that dried beans be stored in an airtight container and be used within a year of purchase for the best quality.

- **Potatoes.** Raw potatoes will last several weeks in the pantry — longer if you can store them in a place that stays cool (50-60 degrees F). They're easy to cook in the oven or the microwave. Top them with some cheese and chopped tomatoes (fresh or canned), and your kids will have a hearty meal.
- **Canned tuna, chicken, fruit and vegetables.** Canned goods last a long time in the pantry — a year or longer. Keep a few of these staples tucked in a back corner for use in emergencies.

Aside from stocking up, you should be sure you're getting the assistance you are eligible to receive. The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers a list of resources online at snap.nal.usda.gov/resource-library/need-food, including the National Hunger Hotline (1-866-348-6479, or in Spanish at 1-877-842-6273). Ohio also has a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program hotline, at 1-866-244-0071.

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