Disaster

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creating a budget and setting Family financial goals. Teach the principles of hard work, frugality, and saving. Stress the importance of obtaining as much education as possible.

One of the most frugal things we can do to lessen expenditures during a crisis is our food supply. We live in complex and perilous times. Whether it is a natural disaster, a national disaster, or a neighborhood disaster, our food supply could be disrupted. In any scenario, it is up to us to take care of our needs and those of our families--we should not count on the government. We buy insurance for our home, our car, and our lives but something as essential as food--we often leave overlooked.

There are other crises as well – personal crises. The loss of a job, a loved one, or one's health might strain personal finances and make a supply of food look very attractive. Whether it is a personal crisis or a community one, we should be able to feed our family and feed them with food that is healthy and that they enjoy eating. In a crisis, our food supply should be a point of comfort and refuge.

There's a certain confidence that goes along with being self-reliant, with preparedness. If we know we have provided for our family--if we know they are safe--we perform better. We're happier and they're happier. We're better parents, citizens, and neighbors and we perform better outside the home.

We hope that you are never faced with a emergency but food storage is not new and it seems that most people who have had long-term food storage have utilized it at least once in the past. Usually, it wasn't because of a public emergency but an economic setback brought about by illness, the loss of a job, or an accident. But times have changed. We expect that community crises--from terrorists to computer failures--will make food storage an even more important issue in the future.

In the Washington DC area during the 2002 sniper shootings, people were running and dodging, taking evasive action between their car and the grocery store. Authorities advised people to make themselves difficult targets. Why would anyone go to the grocery store if they believed they might be shot? People had no choice; they had no food. If people had just a few weeks supply of food on hand, they could have stayed safely at home.

Food storage programs that work are built around one simple principle: Store what you eat and eat what you store. Store what you like, what you know how to fix, and what your bodies are accustomed to. When an emergency comes, we will want to disrupt our eating patterns as little as possible. Most of what we eat today, from main dishes, to breads, to desserts, can be accommodated with storage items. Store them.

Eat what you store. All foods deteriorate over time. They become less palatable and the vitamin content decreases. If you don't use your food, you will throw it out. Surveys have shown that people regularly overestimate how long food lasts. Governmental and university experts publish shelf lives much shorter than what some manufacturers and individuals suggest. The best way to assure that you will have a good supply of food in an emergency is to regularly eat what you store, using it before it becomes marginal, and replace it. Eating what you store is not a challenge if you store what you like to

Five easy steps to a food storage program that works

1. **Determine what you like to eat.** Make a list of what you are eating now. Start with your grocery list or grocery receipts. Look in your pantry. These foods are what you want to store. Storing foods that your family likes to eat--not trying to persuade your family to like what you store--is the key to practical food storage. Fundamentally changing what your family likes to eat is not a realistic expectation. While it may be true that "if our kids get hungry enough, they'll eat anything," who wants to put their children through that kind of misery? In a hardship, we want to maintain our routines and habits as much as possible and not stress family members with foods that they do not like or that their bodies are unaccustomed to.
2. **Determine how much of what you like to eat is storable.** Build your storage program around these items. For those items that are not storable, look for ready substitutes that your family will enjoy. Fresh fruits and vegetables can be complemented with frozen and canned produce. Meats can be purchased on sale or in bulk and frozen. Mixes will readily substitute for the breads, desserts, and snacks you currently buy.
3. **Purchase storable foods regularly.** Keep your plan simple and affordable but buy storable foods regularly. Every week, every pay period, or every month buy something that you can store. You will be surprised how fast your stocks build. Buy items on sale and buy in quantity so that you save money. Think in terms of stocking up, not storing. Replace what you use.
4. **Eat what you store.** As a general rule, even storable foods need to be used within two years. The FDA suggests that canned goods be consumed within two years. Using your stocks regularly will keep your food fresher, tastier, and more nutritious.
5. **Take inventory.** From time to time, take inventory. You will be reminded of what you have and surprised at what you don't have. You can then purchase those items you need and use older items while they are still sound.

A personal food storage program saves money in three ways:

■ Stocking up leads to buying in quantity or on sale--often with substantial savings. If we store what we eat and use those foods regularly, we save on everyday food.

■. Foods suitable for storage tend to be less expensive than prepared foods. As we gradually rely more and more on our stocks, we use less prepared food and the average cost of our meals is reduced.

■ Habits and attitudes change with a food storage program. Those that have a personal food storage program tend to be more careful with their food purchases and better utilize the foods they purchase.

Many families find that when they adopt a program of purchasing and using storable foods, their food bill drops substantially--as much as 25 percent.

We believe that most foods should be used within two years for both palatability and nutritional reasons. Foods stored longer than that, though they may be safe to eat, are less appealing and less nutritious. The only way to build a food storage program that ensures that you will have safe, palatable, nutritious food on hand in an emergency is to continuously rotate stocks.

Our bodies need fat – good fat – and yet most fats are fragile and don't store well. Oil oxidizes and becomes rancid as it ages-a process that is accelerated by heat, light, and oxygen. So store your oil in a cool, dark location and rotate it often.

Assuming that you have stored your valuable food where bugs and water can't reach it, can it still go

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