

**One More Thing to be Thankful For**

*By Cyndie Sirekis*

This Thanksgiving, Americans of all ages, from every walk of life, will gather with friends and family. Most will eat a Thanksgiving dinner with turkey as the mouth-watering main dish, accompanied by a variety of side dishes and trimmings to suit their personal tastes.

Turkey lovers among us have one more thing to be thankful this year—the cost of Thanksgiving dinner will be lower. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation’s annual Thanksgiving Dinner survey of the cost of classic food items to make the meal, consumers will pay about 4 percent less, compared to a year ago.

Declines in the retail cost of dairy products and whole turkeys account for most of the overall drop in the 12-item Thanksgiving dinner basket tracked by Farm Bureau. Whipping cream, rolls, sweet potatoes, peas, cranberries and a vegetable relish tray declined slightly or remained the same in average price.

Three items, canned pumpkin pie mix, frozen pie shells and cubed bread stuffing, increased in retail price. The price uptick in these three staples of a classic Thanksgiving meal, although modest (less than 5 percent), makes perfect sense considering the large amount of energy-intensive processing and packaging for these foods compared to most other items in the survey.

Whether we as consumers like it or not, foods that are highly processed have been slower to show retail price decreases compared to items that are minimally processed, like milk and whole turkeys. This has been true throughout the year.

Farm Bureau’s annual Thanksgiving survey has remained much the same for its 24-year run, to allow for consistent food price comparisons over time. What’s new is the flurry of attention accorded the survey by some retailers, along with its increased visibility in the social media arena.

The grocery business is well-known for being extremely competitive and never more so than today, as the economic recession continues. Anything that could possibly give one store the edge over another when it comes to luring shoppers inside is enticing to marketing managers. That is likely what sparked the recent interest among retail grocers in piggybacking on Farm Bureau’s survey results when developing special holiday meal promotions and pricing.

In addition, the survey results, whether showing the average price for classic Thanksgiving meal items went up or down, have always provided a treasure trove of information for creative print, radio and broadcast stories. Over time, the type of coverage has evolved, with many stories highlighting how food is produced by farmers and ranchers. And more people than ever before are weighing in online with their viewpoints about the survey through social media avenues such as blogs, Tweets and Facebook postings.

This sharing of information—whether centering on getting the most “bang for your buck” on holiday meal items, how to prepare various foods or even tips on buying direct from a local farmer or rancher—ultimately benefits consumers. That’s just one more thing to be thankful for this year, in addition to paying less for a classic Thanksgiving Dinner.