



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
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Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

Meal Planning on a Budget: Simple Ways to Save Money and Eat Well

Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

1. Identify practical ways to reduce grocery spending while still preparing healthy meals.
2. Demonstrate how to create a simple weekly meal plan using affordable ingredients.
3. Apply strategies to reduce food waste and make the most of foods already available at home.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

With the rising cost of groceries, many families are searching for ways to stretch their food dollars while still preparing nutritious and enjoyable meals. Meal planning is one of the most effective ways to reduce waste, avoid unnecessary purchases, and simplify cooking throughout the week. This lesson will provide participants with practical, realistic strategies for planning meals, shopping wisely, and using pantry staples to create balanced meals on a budget.

Lesson:

Meal planning does not have to be complicated. A simple plan can help families save money, reduce stress, and avoid last-minute trips to the grocery store. Begin the lesson by discussing common grocery shopping challenges. Ask participants:

- What grocery items seem most expensive right now?
- What foods tend to go to waste in your home?
- What meals do you cook most often?

Discuss how planning meals before shopping can help avoid impulse purchases and repeated grocery trips.

Practical Meal Planning Tips

1. Start with Foods You Already Have

Before shopping, check the refrigerator, freezer, and pantry. Plan meals around ingredients already available.

Examples:

- Leftover chicken can become soup, chicken salad, or casseroles.
- Overripe bananas can be used in banana bread or smoothies.
- Frozen vegetables are affordable and last longer.

2. Build Meals Around Affordable Staples

Affordable staples can stretch meals and provide nutrition.

Examples include:

- Beans
- Rice
- Pasta
- Oats
- Eggs
- Potatoes
- Frozen vegetables
- Seasonal produce

Discuss how combining these foods with smaller amounts of meat can lower costs without sacrificing satisfaction.

3. Plan Simple Meals for the Week

Encourage participants to plan 4–5 dinners each week rather than trying to plan every meal.

Example weekly plan:

- Monday: Vegetable soup and cornbread
- Tuesday: Baked chicken, rice, and green beans
- Wednesday: Leftover soup and sandwiches
- Thursday: Bean chili
- Friday: Breakfast for supper

Explain how repeating ingredients across meals reduces waste and saves money.

4. Shop with a Grocery List

Using a list helps prevent impulse buying.

Discuss:

- Comparing unit prices
- Buying store brands
- Shopping seasonal sales
- Avoiding shopping while hungry

5. Reduce Food Waste

Americans waste a significant amount of food each year. Small habits can make a difference.

Suggestions:

- Freeze leftovers
- Label foods with dates
- Use older foods first
- Repurpose leftovers into new meals

Stretching Meals Creatively

Discuss ways previous generations stretched meals during difficult economic times:

- Soups and stews
- Using leftovers creatively
- Home gardening
- Preserving foods
- Cooking from scratch

Encourage participants to share family traditions or money-saving cooking tips they learned growing up.

Suggested Materials:

- Sample grocery store advertisements or sale flyers
- Paper and pens/pencils
- Simple weekly meal planning worksheet
- Empty food containers or pantry items for demonstration
- Dry measuring cups/spoons (optional)
- Whiteboard or flip chart

Suggested Activities:

Activity 1: Build a Budget Meal

Divide participants into small groups. Give each group a list of affordable grocery items or sale flyer examples. Ask them to create three budget-friendly meals using the ingredients.

Activity 2: Pantry Challenge Discussion

Ask participants to write down three foods currently in their pantry or freezer. As a group, brainstorm meal ideas using those foods.

Activity 3: Weekly Meal Plan Practice

Provide a blank weekly meal planner and ask participants to fill in several meals for the week using affordable staples and leftovers.

Activity 4: Share a Family Favorite

Invite participants to share a favorite low-cost family recipe or money-saving kitchen tip from past generations.

Lesson Summary:

Meal planning is a simple tool that can help families save money, reduce food waste, and make healthy eating easier. Small changes such as planning meals ahead, shopping with a list, and using foods already available at home can make a significant difference over time. Even during periods of rising food costs, thoughtful planning can help families continue preparing nutritious and satisfying meals.

Lesson Prepared By:

Bailee Floyd: Rural Health and Nutrition Extension Agent. Clemson Cooperative Extension Service

Lesson Review by:

*Rhonda Matthews: Rural Health and Nutrition Program Team Director.
Clemson Cooperative Extension Service*

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