

Food Prices Soaring



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While the monster storm hammering other parts of the country mostly missed us, it's still expected to have an impact on our grocery bills. Shipping delays from western and more midwestern states will only add to some already outrageous produce prices that have been steadily climbing over the last few months.

Local 12's Rich Jaffe shares a look at some serious sticker shock.

Some produce has gotten so expensive, Bryan Madison of Madison's Findlay Market Grocery just won't sell it ... like iceberg lettuce. A 24-count case costs him 34 dollars. A 30 pound box of celery costs 39-dollars. This woman wanted green beans. Bryan had to explain a 26-pound case of beans now costs him 60 dollars.

"A case of limes right now, for a 200 count lime are running 60 dollars. Those used to be, five weeks ago, six weeks ago ... They were 16 to 20 bucks a case ... so they've tripled in just the last six weeks."

The jump in prices is due to a number of things, but mostly fuel costs and weather in growing regions like Florida, Texas, Central and South America. The price of bananas is

expected to soar all year with word Columbia lost 25 percent of its crop. Corn and grain prices also spiked the cost of beef and bacon.

Chef Cynthia Brown says, while it's not her preference, she relies a lot more on frozen vegetables, because the prices are more stable.

"I think anything attached to grain prices, pastas, breads, all of those things are a lot more expensive recently ... I also think green produce ... not so much citrus, but leafy greens, are just astronomically expensive."

The current midwest storm also leaves many people with even more concerns.

"What's the impact of that storm going to be on that growing region... then when you look at what if the rain moves across into Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas, is it going to be so heavy, so extreme, they're going to not freeze out, but will it cause a serious quality issue in the products being grown there now?"

There are still deals to be had, but you have to shop smart. At Madison's, for example, great prices on apples, navel oranges, yams ... and right now, bananas.

It's amazing how many things in the global economy are affecting the price of produce. In South Florida the crash in the housing market is threatening citrus groves because speculators bought groves across the state, planning to develop them. The market crashed, they walked away from 100,000 acres, which are now breeding pests and disease, threatening the surrounding groves. You just never know.

Many of the vendors we spoke with today tell us, with rising prices, they're trying to emphasize quality products, and possibly smaller portions. The hope is, once the local growing seasons get underway, homegrown, less expensive produce will also play an even bigger role.