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EXTENSION**

# Family Matters

*Improving Health Together*

## December 2020 Newsletter

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### Stretching Your Food Dollars

*Amber Webb, Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent,  
Larimer County December 2020*



2020 has been a difficult and challenging year for many, even when it comes to grocery shopping. Many people are shopping less and have seen shortages on products they purchase. On top of that, household budgets have shrunk for millions of people, making more difficult to consistently provide balanced, healthy meals for families.

Being a resourceful meal planner, grocery shopper, and cook has become a necessary skill. Being resourceful means having the ability to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties. Knowing how to stretch your food dollar is one of the most resourceful skills you can use (and share with others!). Keeping a few tips in mind when shopping can help save you money.

#### Four Simple Tips to Help Save Money

##### Get the most out of your meat:

- A whole chicken is often less expensive than pre-cut pieces. Cut it up yourself.
- Make broth out of the chicken bones and skin (and vegetable scraps), then strain and freeze in a muffin tin or ice cube trays.
- Buy larger packages of meat, divide them at home, put them in smaller freezer bags and freeze.
- Large, inexpensive roasts can be cut up into smaller roasts or stew meat.
- Stretch your meat purchases by not making meat the main ingredient. Think about adding vegetables and grains for meals like soups, stews, casseroles and stir-fries.



##### Consider meatless meals:

- Beans and eggs are great protein sources that cost less than meat.
- Make bean soups, burritos, frittatas or omelets, and other vegetarian meals a couple of nights a week.

##### Cook once, eat twice:

- Make double batches of soups, stews, and casseroles, then freeze half for later.
- Make roasted chicken one night, then use leftover chicken to make soup, salad, burritos, or sandwiches for another meal. This not only saves money, but time, too.



##### Pass up packaged cereals:

- Dry packaged cereals are expensive and often have a lot of added sugars.
- Instead try dried oats for oatmeal – buy whole, steel cut, or rolled oats instead of instant oat packets to save money.
- Make overnight oats in the refrigerator or in a crockpot; add dried or fresh fruit and spices.



*Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...*

## Let's Talk

Talk with your kids about the challenges of 2020 and how it has affected your family. Doing so can help them process changes they have experienced. Involve children in creative problem solving to meet any difficulties, even with food. While it might not be an easy conversation, explaining why name brand cereals or snacks aren't going to make it on the grocery list can provide your kids opportunities to help come up with other options. Perhaps suggest making your own trail mix activity, or homemade fruit and yogurt frozen pops. Consider creating a weekly family ritual making muffins on Sunday night for that week's breakfast or homemade pizza on Friday night to keep meals fun. Allow the kids to choose the recipe or toppings. Kids are more likely to eat meals they helped plan, shop for and/or cook.

### Recipe for Health – Tortilla Pie

This recipe is a great quick, budget friendly and delicious meal. Feel free to substitute with vegetables that you have on hand. Tortillas freeze well. Keep an extra package in your freezer for a meal like this!

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

Time: 15 minutes prep, 20 minutes cooking, 35 minutes total

#### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1-1/2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 16 ounce jar of chunky salsa
- 2 cans (15.5 ounces each) white, black, or kidney beans (or a mixture of any two), rinsed and drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) sweet corn kernels, drained, or 1-1/2 cups frozen corn, thawed
- 3 cups coarsely chopped fresh spinach, or 5 ounces of frozen spinach, thawed and drained
- 4 medium-size (8-inch) flour tortillas
- 2 cups (8 ounces) shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese
- Chopped fresh cilantro (optional), for garnish
- Sour cream (optional), for serving



#### Instructions

1. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water.
2. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Spray a 9-inch round cake pan, oven-proof skillet, or baking dish with non-stick cooking spray.
3. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onion, cumin, chili powder and garlic. Cook until onions are soft, about 3 minutes. Stir in salsa and beans, cooking until everything is hot, about 3 minutes. Stir in corn and spinach, cook until spinach has wilted and everything is hot, about 3 minutes.
4. Place 1 tortilla in prepared cake pan. Spread one fourth of bean and vegetable mixture evenly over tortilla, then sprinkle 1/2 cup shredded cheese. Repeat with 3 more layers, ending with the last quarter of bean mixture and the last 1/2 cup shredded cheese.
5. Bake casserole until hot throughout and top is lightly browned, about 20 minutes. Let casserole sit 5 minutes, then cut it into wedges and serve with a spatula or a pie server. Sprinkle top with cilantro and serve with sour cream and/or salsa on the side.

**Cooking Tip:** You can make the tortilla casserole a day ahead of time. Cover it with plastic wrap or aluminum foil, and refrigerate overnight. Take it out of the refrigerator 40 minutes before serving. Let it sit at room temperature for about 20 minutes while the oven preheats to 400°F. Bake uncovered casserole for 20 minutes. To reheat the cooked casserole, bake at 350°F for 15 to 20 minutes.

Adapted from <https://www.splendidtable.org/recipes/mexican-tortilla-casserole>