

21 meals on \$25 a week?

A taste of living on food stamps

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Lucia Guzman stalked the aisles of Safeway, comparing various peanut butters and types of beans. She carefully tallied the cost of the items in her basket on a small pad of paper.

Guzman, executive director of the Mayor's Office for Human Rights and Community Relations, and other city officials agreed to live on food-stamp rations for two days or a week - roughly \$3 a day, or \$25 per person per week.

The Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute and the Colorado Anti-Hunger Network set up the 2007 Food Stamp Challenge in honor of National Hunger Awareness Day, which was Tuesday. State Rep. John Kefalas of Fort Collins, Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and Denver Human Services Manager Roxane White were among those who participated.



Lucia Guzman, a mayoral appointee, grocery shops after accepting a challenge to live on a food stamps budget of \$25.00 per week. (Post / Lyn Alweis)

In Colorado, 251,000 people receive food stamps; according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 220,000 households in Colorado live with hunger or the threat of hunger. Federal statistics show 80 percent of food-stamp benefits go to households with children.

The challenge, according to CFPI, is to show the inadequacy of the food-stamp benefit, which they say covers only about 2 1/2 weeks instead of a month.

The food-stamp benefit does not keep pace with inflation, said Adela Flores-Brennan, federal budget advocate for CFPI.

The challenge, Flores-Brennan said, is to "raise awareness, because not all of us have to deal with these kinds of decisions."

Guzman spent \$23.64 and bought fresh spinach and carrots, oatmeal, eggs and bread. Soy milk, peanut butter and corn tortillas. Beans and brown rice. Plain yogurt and a small package of chicken thighs.

Because Guzman watches what she eats to avoid diabetes, she reads labels for calcium, cholesterol and fiber and tries to avoid sugary, fatty items.

"A lot of poor families aren't able to make that kind of choice," she said.

Items like Hamburger Helper, macaroni and cheese or ramen noodles are cheap but not nutritious, she said.

Kefalas and his wife, Beth, spent \$43.72 on groceries, which included a sack of potatoes, lentils and peanut butter. They tallied in some items already in their pantry.

For lunch, Kefalas, like Guzman, had a peanut butter sandwich. Both grow their own lettuce at home, which will supplement the groceries.

"This experience is strengthening my resolve to work together and reinstate the state Earned Income Tax Credit," Kefalas said.

White, of Denver Human Services, bought bananas, soups, potatoes, prepackaged dinners and peanut butter.

"It is a good and painful reminder of how people struggle to feed their children," said White, adding that she's hungry this week. "I am more aware of the sacrifices my mother made after my father died to feed us."

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\$25 buys ...

Here's a breakdown of mayoral appointee Lucia Guzman's grocery bill. She's accepted a challenge to eat on \$25 for a week to illustrate how far food stamps go.

- Pinto beans \$0.53
- Oatmeal \$2.29
- Tuna \$1.00
- Navy beans \$0.94
- Brown rice \$0.83
- Corn tortillas \$1.29
- Peanut butter \$2.89
- Eggs \$1.69
- Yogurt \$2.19
- Soy milk \$2.30
- Nut bread \$2.50
- Chicken \$2.27
- Spinach \$1.49
- Peppers \$0.64
- Carrots \$0.79
- Total \$23.64