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**YOUR GROCERY BILL IS RISING AND COVID-19 WILL MAKE IT WORSE**

By Sylvain Charlebois  
 Professor  
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Every month, Statistics Canada reminds us that life is getting more expensive. But for food, the situation has been unique over the last few decades. Based on numbers released recently, the price of a typical grocery basket has increased by about 240 per cent since 2000.

Some will think such a percentage is expected, given the effects of inflation. However, the overall cost for other products and services in the economy didn't increase as much as food did – far from it. When we compare the consumer price index with the food price index over the last 20 years, we see a rather marked divide. Except for in Iqaluit, all provinces and territories have seen their consumer price indices outstripped by the food price index. In most cases, the food price index has gained at least 10 points more in 20 years.

The differences are larger in Eastern Canada. In Quebec, the difference between the two is 23.1 points and in Nova Scotia, 21.3 points. The place where the food price index exceeded the general price index the most is in New Brunswick, at 25.8 points.

So over the past 20 years, Canadian households – especially in Eastern Canada – have had to spend more of their budgets on food. Especially in the last decade, the gap between the two indices has widened. For the eastern provinces, the reasons vary between the lack of regionally-based food processing and the higher logistical costs of serving some remote markets. Some may say a sustained rise in food prices may be harmful to the poorest citizens. Well, yes and no.

North America has been the realm of discounted food for some time. We're just coming out of an era in which we've been bent on buying the cheapest food products. For a generation, food industrialization has led us to consume both good and questionable food and we accepted our fate without thinking much about it.

But things are different now. As affordability remains a priority for the agri-food sector, quality, the provenance of food, and the ecological footprint that our choices represent bring their share of complexities and additional costs.

The demanding consumers we have become have plenty of choice, year round. With more innovation, quality is also much better – but there's certainly a price to pay for that.

As a result, the industry has been catching up to our expectations by managing higher costs and passing some of the increases onto us. It will only get worse with COVID-19. It's simple economics.

But the fact remains that some people are struggling to make ends meet. Poverty is invisible but it's there, it surrounds us and will become more of a challenge over the next several months. It's high time to evaluate the possibility of a guaranteed minimum income, for greater financial equity for all.

Despite higher food inflation, there's still some good news for bargain hunters. For several years, we've focused on discussing the more expensive food products. It's just human nature. But did you know that there are a few products priced almost the same as they were 20 years ago?

According to Statistics Canada, flour has increased by 38 per cent since 2000. That's not much. Even better, peanut butter is about five per cent more expensive than in 2000. Of course, prices will vary depending on the region, the type of store and the time of year. But peanut butter has been relatively cheap for 20 years.

And sugar is dirt cheap in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, white sugar is almost the same price as it was in 2000, at \$2.40 per two kg. Although there are only three sugar producers in Canada that control the market – Redpath, Lantic and Rogers in the West – the price of sugar has barely changed in the last two decades.

The sugar industry operates mostly behind the scenes and everything is negotiated privately. Canadian prices are based on world sugar prices, which are significantly lower than prices supported by tariffs in the United States and Europe.

Canada's low import tariffs also mean that global competition for refined sugar keeps prices low here compared to the United States. Sugar prices in Canada are on average about 35 per cent lower than U.S. sugar prices. So food prices are going up, but at least sugar and peanut butter remain a bargain.

**A State Funeral Will Be Held in Memory of the Right Honourable John Napier Wyndham Turner**

Church service will take place on October 6, 2020, at St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica in Toronto. The Government of Canada will hold a state funeral for the Right Honourable John Napier Wyndham Turner, who passed away on September 19, 2020. A church service will be held on October 6, 2020, at 11:00 a.m. at St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica (65 Bond Street) in Toronto. The ceremony will strictly follow public health COVID-19 protocols on mask wearing, sanitizing, physical distancing and congregating. The church service is by invitation only. At the request of the family, there will be no public lying in state or lying in repose. The Government of Canada has proceeded with a half-masting of the National Flag of Canada to honour the memory of Mr. Turner. Flags are at half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada, including the Peace Tower in Ottawa. On the evening of September 19, 2020, the Great Bell in the Peace Tower tolled 91 times—each ring representing a year in the life of the former politician. Canadians are invited to visit the commemorative webpage and learn more about the life and times of Mr. Turner. They can also share their messages of sympathy in the online book of condolences.

The Right Honourable John Turner was Canada's 17th Prime Minister and served from June 30 to September 17, 1984. An accomplished lawyer and politician, Mr. Turner was recognized for his personal integrity and commitment to democracy. Through three decades of public service as a cabinet minister, Leader of the Opposition, and Prime Minister of Canada, he was tirelessly devoted to upholding Canadian values and principles.

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