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Canada's Food Price Report forecasts families will spend \$411 more on food in 2019

Cannabis edibles and plant-based proteins are trends to watch

The average Canadian family is expected to spend \$411 more on food in 2019 than in 2018, bringing the total cost of healthy food to \$12,157 for the year, according to Canada's Food Price Report 2019. This is the report's 9th edition, and the second time it has been released jointly by Dalhousie University and the University of Guelph.

"Overall food prices are expected to rise no more than 3.5% in 2019, a slight increase from last year," says Dalhousie Project Lead Sylvain Charlebois, professor in the Faculties of Management and Agriculture.

The report's authors forecast the following price changes for 2019, with vegetables notably predicted to go up in price by 4% to 6%, a considerable challenge to consumers who struggle to afford healthy food. This report is also predicting a further increase in the cost of restaurant prices due to favourable market conditions and increased labour costs brought about by new minimum wage laws. "With 35% of Canadian's food budgets spent on buying food outside the home, this will have an impact on the wallets of Canadians," says Guelph Project Lead Simon Somogyi, Arrell Chair in the Business of Food at the College of Business and Economics.

Provincially, overall food price hikes are expected to exceed the national average in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Saskatchewan; to be below the national average in the Atlantic Provinces; and to be at the average in Manitoba and Québec.

Trends to watch in 2019 include the legalization of cannabis, the long-anticipated unveiling of Canada's new Food Guide, and the avoidance of meat and a push towards plant-based alternatives.

This year's research team included Dalhousie University colleagues Eamonn McGuinty (Management and Agriculture); Vlado Keselj, Jay Harris and Joon Son (Computer Science); Andrea Giusto (Economics); Catherine Mah (Health); and Janet Music (Management). They joined forces with University of Guelph researchers Francis Tapon and Erna Van Duren, College of Business and Economics, and Paul Uys of the Arrell Food Institute, which Charlebois co-founded. The Nova Scotia Community College also took part in the project.

"Both teams looked at our machine learning model, which generated very accurate results," says Charlebois. "The year 2018 was a good one as most of our predictions from the last report proved to be accurate."

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