

How Does a Family of Three Survive on a Food Stamp Budget?

Posted At : June 20, 2013 2:44 PM | Posted By : Food Bank Staff

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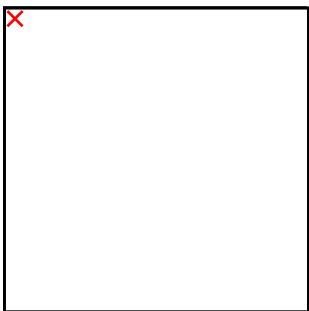
by **Madison Cowan**

That's the question I tried to answer this week. My family and I took Food Bank For New York City's [Food Stamp Challenge](#) to stand in support of New Yorkers in need, and hopefully help stop pending cuts to the food stamp program. We lived on a budget of just \$31.50 per person for the entire week--that's how much food stamp recipients receive.

This wasn't a massive stretch for someone like me who has experienced the depths of poverty and has personally survived with nothing at all. The difference this time, of course, is that when the week was up so was the hardship of eating on such a miniscule budget. Struggling families don't have that option. For them, the situation is all too real, especially when children are factored in. Kids require so much more nutritionally than \$1.50 per meal allows. Families who rely on food stamps to put food on the table live with this reality on a daily basis, and there's no excuse for it in a country of such wealth.

I kicked off the challenge with a trip to Trader Joe's in Brooklyn to buy my groceries for the week. The maximum budget for my family of three: \$94.50. I bought fresh fruit and vegetables, free range chicken, vegetarian chorizo, oats, yogurt, almonds, brown eggs, two types of cheese and bread, miso paste, black beans, noodles, peanut butter, jam, two gallons of milk and more. I ended up spending \$93. While I was able to purchase nutritious food, not everyone has a proper market with affordable prices in their community. That's one of the things that makes living on a food stamp budget so challenging for many people.

For our first dinner of the challenge, I made **spicy sweet potato and vegetable chorizo hash with fried egg**. I fancy veg chorizo as it's tasty, inexpensive and good for you (it's made out of soy protein). If you'd like to give this dish a try, here's the recipe:



- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 ½ sweet potatoes, scrubbed, peeled and diced
- 5 medium garlic cloves, sliced
- 2 large spring onions (white parts only), sliced. Reserve tops.
- ½ vegetarian chorizo sausage
- 2 tsp Worcester sauce
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste

Tabasco to taste

3 eggs

Heat olive oil and butter in a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add sweet potatoes and cook halfway (about 3 minutes). Stir in garlic and onions; cook another 2 minutes. Crumble in the chorizo and season with Worcester, paprika, salt and pepper. Cook another 2 minutes, reduce heat and keep warm. Fry eggs sunny-side up. Portion the hash, top with eggs and serve with thinly sliced reserved spring onion tops and Tabasco. Serves 3.

The challenge proved more difficult as the week went on, but we managed to come up with some satisfying dishes within budget, like oatmeal and blueberries drizzled with a touch of maple syrup and a lick of cream, and homemade ramen noodles with soft-boiled egg. We didn't take a "break" for Father's Day either. That day was the same for us as it was for many low-income families: no going for brunch, no toasting with wine or popping out to get ice cream. Just pancakes for breakfast, tuna melts on rye and black bean soup later in the day--and we were grateful for it.

My family and I were committed to seeing this challenge through. It was a way for us to help Food Bank bring awareness to an extremely important issue. And we got it done for those in actual need.

Chef/author [Madison Cowan](#) is a member of [Food Bank For New York City's](#) culinary council.