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SUPERMARKET SWEEP



Kathy and Tim Fahley, of Oshkosh, shop for groceries at Piggly Wiggly in Oshkosh. The couple say they always shop for store brand products when possible to save money. DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Voters across Wisconsin weigh big decisions

Bill Glauber and Sophie Carson

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

What's at stake?

It's a simple question about a big election. It resonates in big cities and small towns ahead of Tuesday's mid-terms.

As many as 2.7 million Wisconsinites are expected to go to the polls. They'll decide races for U.S. Senate, governor and other major statewide offices, right down the ballot.

They'll shape the future of the state and country.

"What's at stake is not just 2022, 2024, but 2030, 2040, 2050," said the Rev. Martin Childs Jr. of Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church.

Childs was talking on the last Sunday of October at a Souls to the Polls event at a north side Milwaukee shopping center. He expressed concern that a Republican-led government could have long-term, negative effects for democracy and that's why he was so intent on getting worshippers from the pews to the polls.

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These Wisconsin grocery stores are offering the lowest prices

Jelissa Burns Appleton Post-Crescent | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

Spencer Jari has been part owner of the Piggly Wiggly in Omro since 2021. Just five weeks ago, he also purchased the Oshkosh Piggly Wiggly. • He says the current grocery store prices are "by far" the highest he's seen since he started working at Piggly Wiggly, and that effects of inflation can be seen all throughout his stores. • "It's nonstop every week," Jari said. "We have, like, hundreds of items that have to take price increases."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, prices for food at home in the Midwest rose 14.4% since September 2021. The Bureau describes "food at home" as shorthand for the total expenditures for food at grocery stores or other food stores, and food prepared by the consumer while on trips.

Jari said he's seen the most significant increases on meat and dairy, as well as on cereal — with some boxes reaching up to \$8.

The higher prices are having an effect on Jari's store, but not in the way one might think.

"Yes, our sales are up compared to last year, but it's because the prices are up,"

Jari said. "Our profit dollars and our percentage that we make in profit is down."

With no immediate solutions for inflated grocery prices in sight, customers must continue to find ways to save money while shopping for groceries and necessities.

Choosing store brand or generic items has proven to be the cheaper option than choosing name brand when grocery shopping.

In a previous article, The Post-Crescent explored the price difference between store and name brand items at Pick 'n Save and Festival Foods, using a list that included items most people buy when shopping.

The grocery list, made up of 20 items, included whole milk, almond milk, bacon, beef, eggs, peanut butter, jelly, paper towels and toilet paper.

At both stores, customers saved over \$20 choosing store brand items.

Yet, it was shown that customers would save the most money shopping at Aldi, where a majority of their items are store brand.

We've now visited four additional grocery stores to find where customers can find the best savings when choosing store brand over name brand groceries.

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Driver now an owner of 6 Cousins Subs locations

Richard Ryman

Green Bay Press-Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

Donald Driver, the Green Bay Packers' all-time leading receiver, is now a co-owner of six Cousins Subs restaurants in Green Bay and the Fox Valley.

Cousins Subs and Driver entered into a joint venture agreement for the six restaurants, the first such arrangement in the company's 50-year history. Cousins Subs has its headquarters in Milwaukee. Driver has homes in Milwaukee and Texas.

"Since establishing Cousins Subs 50 years ago, we have been very protective of our family-owned brand," said Christine Specht, CEO at Cousins

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Prices

Continued from Page 1A

Which store offers the most savings?

Based on reader requests, we visited Woodman's, Piggly Wiggly, Meijer and Walmart and compared popular name brand items to each store's store brand items.

The total cost of the grocery list at Walmart, using only name brand items, added up to \$69.67, with the highest priced item being one pound of Oscar Mayer bacon for \$7.98. When shopping the same list using products only from Walmart's store brand, Great Value, the total came to \$48.47, for a savings of \$21.20.

Walmart's Great Value brand was first introduced in 1993 and is now the country's largest food brand in sales and volume, according to their website. In 2009, Walmart revamped the Great Value brand and added more than 80 items to the inventory.

"Fighting inflation is in our DNA," said a Walmart spokesperson. "It has always been our core promise to save customers money so they can live better lives. Across our business we're working hard to mitigate increases and be the last in retail to make changes. We've made significant investments to ensure we can continue to deliver amazing value for our customers."

Walmart has 99 Supercenter locations in Wisconsin.

Meijer also offered about \$20 in savings when choosing between name brand and store brand. When shopping at Meijer using only name brand items off our list, the total came to \$73.08, while the store brand total equaled \$53.01. The highest priced item from Meijer on our grocery list were Bounty paper towels for \$7.79. The store brand alternative was only \$3.19.

Meijer has a variety of store brands, including ones for clothing and furniture, but their main store brands for groceries are Meijer Brand, True Goodness by Meijer and True Goodness by Meijer Organics.

Wisconsin has the fourth-most Meijer retail stores, with 12 locations throughout the state.

Requests for an interview with Meijer were not returned.

Customer would spend the least on our list at Woodman's

Woodman's, founded in 1919 in Janesville, is an employee-owned supermarket chain known for its low prices and large selection.

Their stores average 230,000 square feet, almost 400 times the size of the first original store. The stores offer grocery items, a large liquor selection, on-line shopping with pickup and delivery services, and gas stations with oil change centers.

The chain is able to keep its prices low because they buy directly from manufacturers. It also has a "no credit card" policy, allowing only cash, check or debit cards as a form of payment. This allows the company to save on credit card fees and, in turn, keep prices low.

Woodman's offered the lowest total cost on both name brand and store brand prices. The name brand total came to \$65.59, the lowest total of all four stores. Their store brand total came to \$55.27.

While the savings gap only came to \$10.32, the store had the lowest overall prices despite continuous inflation and supply shortages.

Oscar Mayer bacon was the highest-priced item on the list at \$6.99; the store brand alternative was \$4.69.

Woodman's is a regional chain with 19 locations across Wisconsin and Illinois only. The low number of locations can make it difficult for some customers who would like to shop at the grocery store but aren't located near one.

Madison is the only city in Wisconsin with two Woodman's locations. Other eastern Wisconsin cities with a Woodman's are Green Bay, Appleton, Menominee Falls, Waukesha, Oak Creek and Kenosha.

Woodman's headquarters did not respond to an interview request.

Competitive wages can be to blame for Piggly Wiggly's prices

The second-largest chain in this comparison, Piggly Wiggly has over 530 stores across 17 states, with 93 located in Wisconsin. Each store is independently owned and operated, yet they operate as a franchise, meaning each store pays a percentage of their revenue to the parent company in New Hampshire. Because the stores are independently owned, each store's prices and



Store brand items such as Food Club cooking stock is available alongside name brand items such as Swanson cooking stock at Piggly Wiggly in Oshkosh.

DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN



First-time voter Cameron Bennett, 18, right, a member of Mount Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church in Milwaukee, signs his ballot after voting as his father, Stacy Bennett, takes a photo and Election Commission staff member Josephine Ewing, left, observes as part of the Souls to the Polls at Midtown Shopping Center on West Capitol Drive in Milwaukee on Oct. 30.

sales may vary.

When shopping at the Oshkosh Piggly Wiggly, located at 525 E. Murdock Ave., the total for name brand prices came to \$89.11, the highest total of all four stores. When using their store brand alternative, Food Club, the total came to \$71.11, resulting in exactly \$18 in savings.

"Customers aren't as happy," Jari said. "They get mad at us saying the prices are too high, but we just adjusted

our costs. We're having to sell stuff at higher dollars, and we make less money."

Jari said they are paying a lot more than they used to for wages and bills and that they have to adjust their prices higher every week.

"We got to make the money back somewhere so we can afford to stay open," Jari said.

Piggly Wiggly, alongside most grocery stores in the state, is still struggling with supply chain issues, making it harder for them to get some of the items they're used to having. However, the store has weekly sales on meat, produce, dairy and more.

Customers also can sign up for the free membership program that gives them the opportunity for additional savings when checking out. Using the card can accrue Pig Points, which can then be used to earn discounts on their grocery purchases and fuel.

The Wisconsin Department of Revenue said, in an economic update released in August, that inflation continues to be the largest downside risk to the economic outlook.

It is projected for the consumer price index to rise 8.2% this year, 4.1% in 2023 and 1.9% in 2024.

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