



### Strike calls for creative cooking

MANY OF Hawaii's striking public teachers and university faculty are anticipating days of greater financial hardship. This, in turn, may affect what they can afford to eat.

Food in Hawaii is about one-third more expensive than the mainland average, the United States Department of Agriculture estimates in its "Thrifty Food Plan." This plan serves as the national basis for determining food stamp allotments for a nutritious diet at minimal cost.

The USDA indicates that the average cost of a thrifty, nutritionally adequate diet for a family of four on the mainland is about \$445 a month. This assumes that the food is purchased at stores and prepared at home. In Hawaii, the USDA estimates the cost is about \$680 a month, a \$235 difference.

So how can you eat well, with respect to good nutrition and flavor, yet be very economical? Perhaps, the answer comes in one word: stews.

A stew is any combination of ingredients cooked slowly in a liquid. Slow cooking allows inexpensive ingredients to become tender. The combination of fla-

vors can make for satisfying meals.

Although stews may take pre-planning, they require relatively little hands-on time. Here are a few tips:

**Simple rice stew:** Once you have the rice cooker and rice ready to go, add lentils and additional water as indicated on the lentil package. You also can add peeled garlic cloves. Once the rice is cooked, add other ingredients for flavor, such as tomato sauce, V-8 juice, prepared dashi or furikake.

**Meat and vegetable stews:** Make sure that everything is cut in bite-size pieces. Brown the meat, then add water or tomato juice, the vegetables that take the longest time to cook, followed by ingredients that require less cooking time. Often frozen or canned vegetables are less expensive and take less time to cook.

A low-cost sauce can be made from diluted tomato paste flavored with dry herbs such as sage, rosemary or thyme, or a sprinkle of pre-mixed seasonings. A relatively plain stew can be transformed into a home-cooked meal. To provide a more

upscale flavor, buy a fresh basil plant and add a few freshly chopped leaves just before serving. Lots of flavor for relatively little cost.

**Bean stews:** Dried beans are economical and contain a fair amount of protein. To begin, spread beans on a flat surface and pick out any dirt or stones; rinse clean.

Cover beans with double the amount of water and bring to a boil. Turn off heat and let sit 20 minutes. Repeat twice more, changing water and rinsing beans each time. Most beans will cook perfectly this way, and by draining the water you also get rid of the components that cause the intestinal gas often blamed on beans. For garbanzos (chickpeas), let them sit overnight after the first heating.

To ensure that the beans cook adequately, it is essential to cook them to edible softness before adding acidic ingredients such as tomato sauce. Acid stops the softening process.

Even if the strike ends soon, these frugal tips might help survive too many dips in the Dow.

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