



## **Urban Survival: Supplies for What Is In Store – Food**

**By Paul C. Scheib**

Scarcity is nothing new. After all, it was not until the 19th century when technology moved a large percentage of the American population past subsistence agriculture and allowed them to eat more than 1,200 calories a day on a daily basis. That number is important because it represents the minimum caloric intake needed for humans to function at a normal level.

Caloric intake improved thanks to the industrial revolution. The food supply chain converted to mechanization, which increased yields. The finished product reached its markets via sophisticated transportation systems. This change created low cost food sources that allow different areas of the country to specialize in what grows best in their soil.

Today, the agricultural system is very efficient thanks to computer technology and information networks that allows farmers and ranchers to grow and raise what the markets need and for distribution companies to supply those markets on a just-in-time basis. Those systems give our cities and small towns a fresh food supply year round that has reduced waste to historically low levels.

Our food network is so good at delivering large quantities of low cost food, that it has created a new problem: wide spread obesity.

But that is not its only flaw. The agricultural system depends on petroleum and information. If any event widely disrupts those two commodities for a length of time, your city could run out of food in as little as 3 days. A shock to the system, such as a natural disaster, would cause the store shelves to be depleted in as little as 12 hours.

We have an example of the former from France in October, 2010. At the time, the trade unions were protesting austerity measures that would raise the retirement age from 60 to 62. Their strategy was to block the fuel resupply of the country's petrol stations to pressure President Sarkozy to back down. He did not and within 3 days, only 21% of the country's petrol depots were still in operation. With limited fuel, the economy began to grind to a halt. By day 5, some of the populace had run out of food and civil unrest had begun. In the end, the trade unions relented, because they had been defeated in the court

of public opinion. This incident is important because it shows what can happen in a very short period of time in a 1<sup>st</sup> world economy.

It would not take a shut down of food networks for you to have a problem feeding yourself and your family. The loss of income due to job loss or a sharp down turn in the economy, or even strong inflation might also create the problem of not being able to afford food. Either way, I believe it is a good idea to have a store of food that you can access under emergency conditions.

### **Factors to Consider**

The best approach to food storage is to build it up over time. You should be buying things on sale and putting away the extra. You should also be rotating the stock and cooking with every type of product you buy to see how it works under emergency conditions. There is nothing worse than having a solution that you cannot use when you really need it. The classic example of this is having all the can goods you can eat and no can opener.

The biggest factor you have in storing food is refrigeration. If for some reason, the power fails, you could lose everything in the refrigerator. That means relying on frozen food is a gamble. There is nothing wrong with having frozen foods in your mix. However, I would not recommend making it the mainstay of your reserve food supply.

That leaves four other types of food that can be stored: fresh products that are canned, shelf staple dry goods, freeze dried foods, and dehydrated food. Each of these categories has its own pros and cons.

The biggest bang for your food buck is shelf stable foods like rice, flour, pasta, dried beans, salt, sugar, and peanut butter that can be purchased in bulk from Costco or Sam's Club. These foods provide a lot of calories that you may need if you are working to clean up a post-disaster mess. These items are shelf stable for up to five years. The biggest draw back is those items can be attacked by bugs or rats. So you may want large totes or other containers to protect the food items.

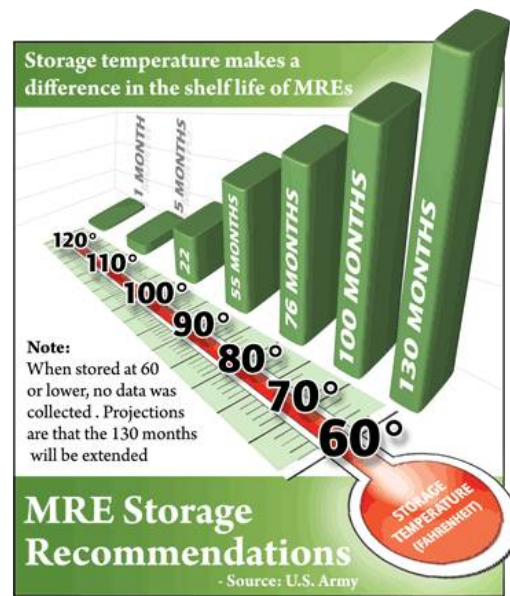
Canned foods are also relatively inexpensive and easy to store. You can often find them on sale two for one. Big Lots often has great deals on canned goods, just make sure to check the sell by dates on them. Remember, the larger the cans the lower the cost. However, large cans risk spoilage if you are unable to consume the product quickly. The problem with cans is that they have a relatively short shelf life of two to three years and they need to be rotated with new stock.

Companies like Food Insurance, Emergency Essentials, and Costco.com carry freeze-dried and dehydrated meals. There are complete meal options, as well as à la cart meats, milk, vegetables, fruits, and even deserts in large quantities.

The difference between freeze-dried and dehydrated food is how you make them and the time the product can be stored.

Freeze-dried foods, such as MREs, can just be heated in their packages either in boiling water or next to a heat source. Since the packages are foil or tin cans, you cannot microwave them in their packages. Dehydrated foods require hot water to “cook” them. The items must be combined in some sort of container to be prepared. Some of the items need to be boiled for some time.

Freeze-dried food can be stored up to 10 years under the right conditions. They should be kept in cold, dry environments, because they degrade more rapidly, the higher the temperature. (See the graph at right)



Dehydrated foods can be stored between 15 and 25 years, depending on manufacture. They are not sensitive to temperature the way freeze dried foods are and that makes them more shelf-stable.

The main draw back to dehydrated foods is that they are more expensive than shelf stable or canned good items and they must have heated water to make them. This makes travel with them more difficult than a freeze dried option. The downside with freeze dried options is that they are the most expensive of your options and they can have a very short shelf life under hot conditions. Both of the prepackaged option taste good and offer a good variety of food options.

## What to Store

Your food plan should start with your calculation of how long you might need to shelter-in-place or supplement your food purchases because of scarcity. Your food plan should be flexible enough to take some of it with you if you are forced to flee your home. It should also be plentiful enough to sustain you and your family during an extended crisis. To achieve these goals, you need a mix of the food types. The following is a list of shelf stable items that will give you a balance of carbohydrate, protein, and fats.

1. **Rice** – This is the quintessential survival food. It makes up a large portion of food aid delivered around the world. It is shelf-stable for more than 5 years. Plus it can be mixed with almost anything. You can buy 50 pound bags of rice at Sam’s or Costco for just a few dollars

2. **Pasta** – Buy a variety of semolina products from couscous to spaghetti. This is a great staple for energy. You can use small noodles in soups and stews and large noodles in casseroles. Kid will love canned ravioli and mac & cheese.
3. **Flour** – Bread is an important food staple, but when baked, it does not survive long. Flour, on the other hand, can stay fresh in sealed containers for years without refrigeration. However, flour keeps best when refrigerated. You should get a mix of white, wheat, and corn meal. The corn meal makes great finishing flour for turning dough on.
4. **Cereals** – You should have a mix of cold and hot cereals such as oatmeal, cream of wheat, and grits. Hot cereals tend to keep you from being hungry longer than their dry counterparts and you don't need milk to eat them. Syrup or sugar will make them taste better for kids.
5. **Crackers** – These are an easy to store and eat on the go snack that can really enhance soups and stews.
6. **Popcorn** – This is a comfort food. It is something that can help you to feel more normal in stressful situations. It is also shelf-stable for years.
7. **Salt** – As a basic ingredient in almost all food preparation, you should have a large supply of salt on hand. It can be used as a food preservative as well.
8. **Sugar** – This is another basic staple that is used in many forms of cooking and baking. You can get 25lbs bags of sugar a Sam's or Costco.
9. **Baking Goods** – These are the remaining ingredients you need to make bread, pancakes, or other baked goods. Your store should *include baking powder, buttermilk powder, baking soda, corn starch, and yeast*, which should be kept refrigerated or frozen.
10. **Tomato Paste** – This is the base you will need for anything that requires a tomato sauce. It takes up far less space than storing the actual sauce.
11. **Diced Tomatoes** – Adds Vitamin C to your diet and flavor to your food.
12. **Flavor Aids** – *Spices* such as onion powder, oregano, hot sauces and *seasoning packets* for spaghetti, chili, and yellow rice are essential if you are eating a lot of the same things, to keep them interesting.
13. **Soups** – The second oldest cooked food behind grilled meat is soup and you've got to have stock to make it taste good. Include in your soup store bullion cubes, cream of chicken soup, cream of mushroom soup, cream of cheddar soup, and dried soup mixes. The creamed soups make a good base for casseroles and stews that can feed a lot of people and are easy to cook. Plus they add flavor and fat to the foods you are cooking.
14. **Canned Vegetables** – Green beans, corn, and peas are the most abundant type of vegetable that are canned. The need for vegetables is self-explanatory.
15. **Beans** – Both dried beans and canned beans are great sources of protein. People have survived famines living on rice and beans. Canned beans tend to taste better than dried beans but the latter can be stored for more than five years.
16. **Shelf-Stable Proteins** – You need proteins that will not spoil if the power goes out, so you should get a supply of freeze dried meats, freeze dried cheese, dehydrated fortified milk, dehydrated eggs, protein powder, and peanut butter. The milk and peanut-butter will be especially important if you have kids.

17. **Condiments** – Like ketchup, mustard, and barbeque sauce, syrup, jellies/jams, hot sauce, and honey add calories and flavor. They also make great trade items.
18. **Drinks** – Store coffee and tea for your caffeine fix. Hot coco is good for the kids. You should also have other drink mixes like Kool-Aid and sports drink powders. The sports drink will be important for replacing electrolytes if you are working hard to clean up a mess. Drink mixes can also make filtered and disinfected water taste better. Sodas are not the best option in a crisis because the high sodium content will dehydrate you.
19. **Cooking Oils and Sprays** – Store large quantities of vegetable and olive oil for baking and frying. Sprays will make it easier to grill and fry.
20. **Alcohol** – Just a quick note on this subject. During a crisis, the last thing you want to consume is alcohol. It will dehydrate you, make you sleepy at inopportune times, and keep you awake when you need to be sleeping. That said, alcohol and tobacco do make a great barter items.

## The Plan

I have experimented with a variety of food storage solutions and this is my recommendation for your storage. Start with 30 days of freeze-dried or dehydrated meals in *individual meal packages* for each member of your family. If you must leave your home quickly you will grab these meals and go. Food safety tip: make sure to write on the outside of the storage boxes the date you received the boxes so you can monitor shelf life.

Next put together staples of rice, pasta, tomato paste, diced tomatoes, cream soups, canned vegetables, cereals, peanut butter, salt, sugar, coffee/tea, dried beans and cooking oil to make meals for 60 more days. These staples are not exciting, but can sustain you for long periods of time. Your goal is to be able to eat 1,200 calories a day with these staples.

Next, add the freeze-dried meats, cheeses, the dehydrated milk and eggs to that 60-day supply.

Finally, add flour, baking goods, drink mixes, bullion, spices, seasoning packets, condiments, jellies/jams, crackers, soup mixes, and popcorn. These are items that will enhance the taste of whatever you are eating. During this phase, you may also want to store anything that you really like to flavor your food with – like hot sauce or honey. These two food categories will get you up to the 2,000 calorie a day level.

Once you have that 90-day supply completed, you will be well supplied for most disasters. If you wish to prepare for food scarcity, you can repeat this process until you have reached the level of food preparedness you feel is sufficient to protect your family.

In the repeated cycles, you will want to change the individual freeze dried or dehydrated meals to larger quantities meals or à la cart items. This mixes gives you 33% of your calories in–long term storage solutions. If geo-political problems stabilize, you can eat all

the everyday foods you have and still have an emergency food supply in case of a natural disaster.

### **How much is enough?**

This is a difficult question to answer, because no one knows what the future will hold. On one hand, FEMA recommends 72 hours worth of supplies, on the other; many survivalists believe that a one year supply is best.

What I think is that you need enough on hand to make it through the next North American growing season. If there is a major disruption to the international food supply system, there may be very limited food available in the fall and winter months. However, food will become more available from gardens and farms during the spring and summer growing season. The art and science of agriculture is not easy, so there will be more on survival gardening in a later article.

The decision to store food is an easy one. The process of putting away and turning over stock is a difficult one and it takes time. But in these uncertain times, does it not make sense to do that now given that a war in the Middle East or the economic collapse of Europe could make food scarce?

I want to encourage you to start today. Being prepared for a scarcity will help you to not panic and give you options to help others. You can be a light in the darkness, but first you must be prepared.

### **The Next Steps**

Now that you have a framework upon which to build your food store, you can take steps and prepare. To take full advantage of this course, you must do the exercise outlined at the end of each of the articles.

#### **Exercise 6:**

**Step 1:** If you have not read [The Anatomy Of a Crisis: Threats and Response Planning](#) and done the exercises, be sure to do that. Then, decide how large of food storage you would like to put away.

**Step 2:** Write down your storage target and then create an outline of your food storage plan and put it into your survival binder. List everything you already have that you will include in your food store. Then, add to your to-buy list the items you need to add to your food store.

**Step 3:** Print out this article and put it into your binder. Make sure everyone in the family knows where to find the reference material in case they need it.

You should work first on having a one-month supply of food in reserve for every member of the family. It should be easy to prepare and something that everyone in the family will eat. You need to think about how you would cook it if there were no power. You will want to invest in some sort of alternative heating system like a grill, camp stove, Sterno cans, or a back-up generator. You will need water to cook and clean up. Advice on that subject can be found in the article [How to Collect, Clean, and Store the Key to Life: Water](#). Once you have the ability to eat for a month without buying anything from a store, start to expand your reserve to meet your survival plan objectives.

*Remember you do not need everything today. You just need to work at it. Now, go execute.*

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