

Eating better without spending more Jane Tomlinson of Redhill Farm Free Range Pork discusses a relevant topic for all of us - eating well without breaking the bank



Jane is passionate about good produce, whether it's meat or vegetables. She believes that buying as much fresh food as possible and knowing exactly what is in your food is the way to avoid food scares, eat healthier and save money.

Do you want to eat better quality food but don't think you can afford it? I hope to prove to you that you can make the best quality food, using the best ingredients and save yourself money - there's just one catch - you'll have to spend more time and effort to do it!

It's about replacing processed foods with home cooked meals, skipping the ready meal or takeaway in favour of your own fresh, seasonal food and making a few changes to how you think about the food you buy.

So what can you do? It's all about the choices you make...

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR FOOD AND REDUCE THE COST

- 1 **Always buy the best quality meat you can afford.**
- 2 **Eat better quality meat but eat less - eat more vegetables and carbs to go with less meat.**
- 3 **Cuts of meat - Buy the simplest whole cuts/joints - ie: whole chickens instead of steaks, and buy good quality cheaper cuts of meat (cheaper cuts of quality meat are NOT worse quality - they just require a bit more skill and knowledge about how to cook them and often need cooking for longer).**
- 4 **Make the most of every bit of meat you buy - don't waste it, use it all.**
- 5 **Plan ahead - buy only what you need to cook with - don't impulse buy or buy when you are tired or feeling hungry!**
- 6 **Make a shopping list - and stick to it!**
- 7 **Cut down on waste - replace money wasted on food thrown away with higher quality food so that you don't waste it.**
- 8 **Cook from scratch.**
- 9 **Cook for all the family to eat the same meal, together, at the same time.**
- 10 **Cook double the quantity and freeze - and make the most of bulk buys, seasonal produce gluts, supermarket offers on staple ingredients.**

Better quality meat

It's about rebalancing your attitude to food, valuing the quality of food over the convenience and speed in preparing and eating it. Meat in particular has been devalued over the years - cheap, low grade meat is plentiful and subsequently most of it is wasted. Quality meat is deemed as expensive in comparison - but quality meat is not cheap to produce and economy meat will only ever be the poorest quality. It's only when food scares appear that people stop to take notice and then don't know what to do as an alternative.

Go direct to the producer

With meat, the less that's done to it, and the nearer you get to the producer the cheaper, more value for money, the fresher and better quality it is going to be. With every stage that gets in between you and the producer the higher the costs, the lower the quality and once any

processing starts the less knowledge about what is actually in the food, the more you start paying for the things you don't want or need to be eating and the poor value for money really starts to kick in.

Cut down on waste

Did you know? We throw away 7.2 million tonnes of food and drink from our homes every year in the UK. Wasting food costs the average family £680 per year - that's equivalent to £56 per month.

"Waste not! Want not!" was one of my mother's favourite sayings. Growing up in a family of seven, myself and four brothers, on a modest income and managing to eat fresh, good quality food every day was down to my mother's resourcefulness. All our meals were cooked from scratch, with fresh vegetables and fruit from the garden, meat from good butchers or direct from farmers bought in bulk - that's where I learnt first hand how to make the most of the meat we bought even down to making sausages with mum at the kitchen table! I'm not suggesting that you all rush out and take a butchery course and dig your lawns up to plant potatoes but if you want good quality food on a budget you need to dig deep and find your own levels of resourcefulness!

Put in the time and effort:



Its simple - the MORE time and effort you put in, the HIGHER the quality of the food and the LOWER the cost.

Not to mention the higher nutritional value - good quality food 'feeds' you longer (especially protein so you are not feeling hungry so soon again after a meal) and you then save money on 'snacks' - consider what you spend per month on snacks - the

ultimate high cost food with least nutritional value.

Find your own level

You can take this simple idea to different levels depending on what suits you from week to week - what time/skill/effort you have at certain times. You will not always have the time to put in the maximum effort so adjust your meal planning to suit your lifestyle:

MEAL EXAMPLE

LASAGNE

Even at the lowest level this way you still buy the best quality minced beef and pork - the part that's most important in this particular meal - and so much better quality and value for money even at the lowest effort level for this dish than if you bought the whole Lasagne as a ready meal.

EG: LASAGNE

- Highest level (max quality and least cost)** = Cook everything from scratch
- Medium level** = Use a jar of tomato sauce
- Lower level** = Use jars of tomato and cheese sauce



Farmer's markets such as the ones held in front of Lincoln Castle enables you to buy direct from the producers.

Think about what the key ingredient is for each meal that you need to ensure is the best quality part of it and spend your money on that - for the rest, if you can't cook everything from scratch at least you know it's much better than the bought processed pre-packed version and you've made the key part of it yourself.

This way you can start to substitute all the ready meals/takeaways that you enjoy with your own homemade versions.

10 Benefits that will improve your life!

- 1 **You never need to decipher a label again** - for additives, fat content, salt, what the real ingredients are or where they have actually come from.
- 2 **Additives, preservatives, antioxidants etc. are all the things that give processed foods a longer shelf life** - they're only there for the benefit of the supermarket - if you make it yourself you don't need any of these - you'll either eat it or freeze it.
- 3 **Better quality food**
- 4 **Quality meal times with family or friends** - you'll want to share and they'll enjoy it more.
- 5 **Improved health** - especially important for children to replace the toxins and chemicals that will harm them at the time when their bodies and brains are developing and need high quality food and nutrients.
- 6 **Less stress** - planning ahead. Processed foods are all about saving time because we're all too busy - that's where the manufacturers get you to spend so much - impulse buys/short term convenience - plan - cook - cook in advance - cook double the quantity - (the time and effort spent cooking can often be less and less stressful than that racing to supermarkets, waiting at takeaways) - and then you've got another meal for another day.
- 7 **Convenience too!** - Plan ahead for the things you like - and then get the ingredients when it's convenient to you eg: Farmers' market - you might like produce from one or two a month as different markets have different producers, fruit & veg market on certain days, fish van, seasonal British fruit and veg
- 8 **TASTE!** The one thing I've not mentioned yet! The taste will be sensational compared to ready meals - all fresh ingredients, free from additives, free from extra salt and extra sugar, free from things pumped with water or brine or cereal type fillers to make the product cheaper. Your food will TASTE SO GOOD - the less you do to good quality meat the better. The same can't be said for some tasteless supermarket meat pumped with water and cling wrapped.
- 9 **SAVE YOU MONEY!**
- 10 **Satisfaction** - the glow of a good cook providing for your family!

Family meal planning.

When we are all busy and leading different activities in a week it's hard to get the family together, eating the same food - especially young families. Different age groups may not want to eat the same foods.

What we did as a family with two adults, two boys and the youngest a girl was to get together around the table, taking it in turns to put our favourite foods on a 'family meals' list - that way everyone gets involved. We made a list for a month of around 30 dishes. Variety meant some full roasts, shepherds pies, lasagne and quicker, simpler pasta dishes, homemade burgers, stir-frys. Once a week select 3 things you are going to cook knowing that you are cooking double for 2 nights to either eat again or to adapt easily to another meal - by planning ahead you can



Jane promotes good food use at the Lincolnshire Show with chef, Rachel Green.

select meals that provide a balance. How many of us would otherwise cook the same things all the time - due to lack of time and energy to think of something else? We have all succumbed to the habit of buying the same ingredients without a prepared shopping list because of time pressures. If you are too busy for a couple of days then choose a quick dish and do a bigger full pie or roast later in the week.

Our children are older now but it worked for us - we also included a couple of new recipes/dishes to try each month - then we all decided if it was good enough to make it onto the family list to have again.

The result is - we all eat together - we all have favourites that we look forward to - we eat a wider variety - it's made working and then cooking for a family easier - more fun - and there's no waste - no-one not eating something because they don't like it as it wouldn't make it onto the list to start with. If someone doesn't like mushrooms they just pick them out of their dish as my daughter did when she was 5 - now she's 15 she loves them - but because she's always had them it was left up to her without any pressure to eat them if she wanted to. The important point was that we weren't cooking different meals for different members of the family to eat at different times.

Now older teenagers, my children have acquired the skills and knowledge to cook a variety of meals for themselves - and so useful when they are off to University or living away from home. They can cook for their friends and house-mates - cooking bigger meals between them all means they can chip in a modest amount and the result is a really good quality meal for all of them.

Join the Food Revolution!

By adopting these changes and rising to the challenge you will become part of the new food revolution! You will notice soon a wave of TV programmes raising our awareness of this problem for households, trying to feed families on lower incomes, but also tackling the problem of food waste - it's all about eating better quality meat but eating less, eating more plant based foods with our meals, its better for the environment and helps combat the problems associated with global food production. It leads to a long term, better quality of life for all of us, for our health, wealth and happiness!

For more tips and ideas about reducing food waste and family meal planning have a look at this great website 'LoveFoodHateWaste.co.uk'

For a comprehensive monthly calendar of farmers' markets in and around Lincolnshire to find a huge variety of local produce and producers visit www.redhillfarm.com/farmers-markets