

Changing Traditions: The Impact of Rising Food Prices on Holiday Meals

HALIFAX, December 1, 2023 — The holiday season is fast approaching and Canadians, new and old, and of many cultures and backgrounds, celebrate by sharing food with loved ones. For many, [traditional Christmas foods](#) such as Turkey are front and centre, with vegetable dishes playing supporting roles. But as the demographic makeup of Canada changes, so too does the Christmas table, with many choosing [plant-based alternatives](#) or creating a [hybrid holiday](#) with traditional meals from home countries, that serve all the warmth of family, which is so important this time of year.

Regardless of one's background, as we get ready for the cold winter months ahead, many of us indulge—or indeed overindulge—during the holidays. This year, indulging in holiday foods will be an [expensive proposition](#). For the past few years, the focus has been on food prices, as we have seen the cost of food reach record highs in a way many of us have not experienced in the past. There are several underlying issues at play here: adverse weather impacting growing and harvests, geopolitical events driving up the cost of energy, and labour disputes throughout the supply chain limiting supply. Since the advent of the pandemic, food price inflation has risen, [on balance over 20%](#).

Yet, while food prices are expected to stabilize, the high cost of shelter is causing many people to recalibrate their holiday traditions. High-interest rates have put many families in a precarious position. [Food bank usage is up 78.5% since 2019; one-third of those relying on food banks are children](#).

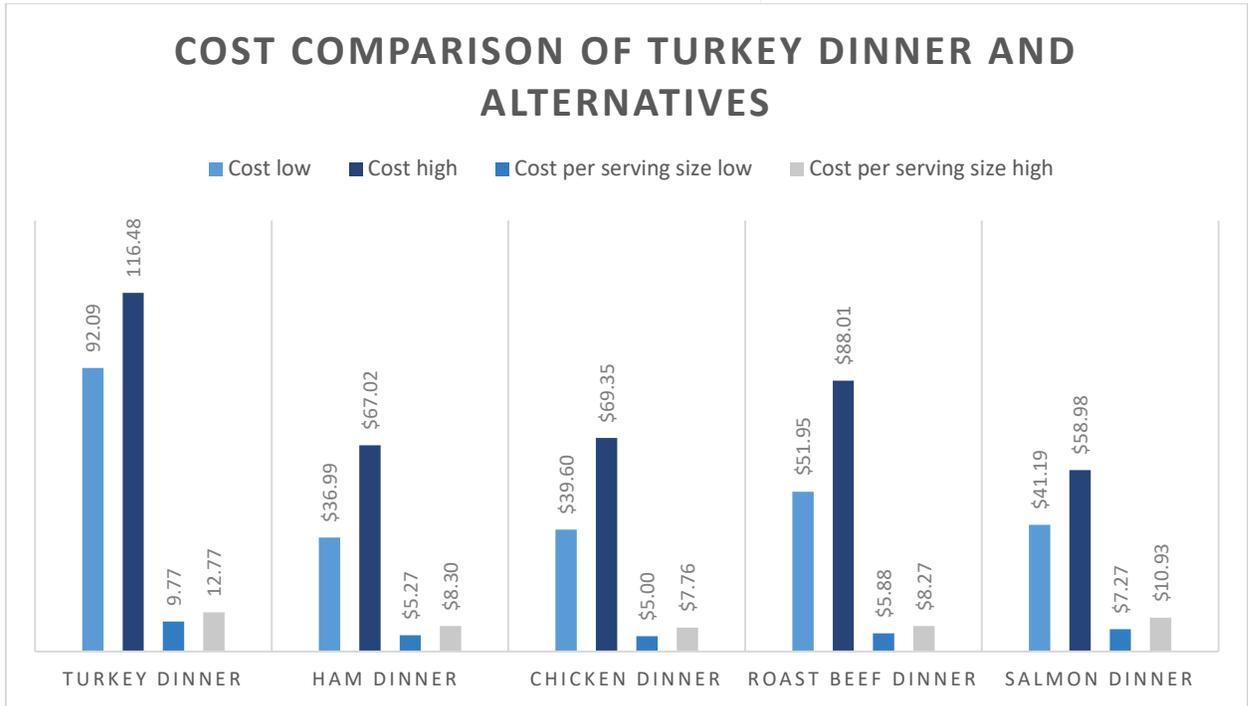
Costs of a Holiday Dinner

The traditional Canadian holiday meal is generally centred around turkey with side vegetables or meat pies, followed by a dessert of some kind. This year, prices are higher than they have been in the past. Using data from the [Agri-food Lab at Dalhousie University](#), a traditional Christmas meal for a group of 4 to 6 people will cost consumers approximately \$104.85 on average. While the food inflation rate begins to drop, many shoppers will find that those items that make up a traditional meal are experiencing similar or higher price increases. Roughly, turkey is up 5%, potatoes are up 6.6%, and carrots are up 12.8%. Yet when we look at the per unit costs of a full turkey dinner with gravy and rolls, fruitcake, and eggnog, we find that the cost per person is approximately \$9.48. A reasonable price to overindulge with those you love.



Item	Cost		Cost per serving size	
	low	high	low	high
Roast Turkey	34.61	34.61	1.08	1.35
Gravy	1.29	1.29	0.02	0.02
Cranberry Sauce	5.49	5.49	0.62	0.77
Mashed Potatoes	4.99	8.99	0.23	0.42
Stuffing				
White bread	2.79	2.79	1.86	1.86
Onion	0.94	3.79	0.03	0.11
Celery	1.99	4.49	n/a	n/a
Roast Vegetables .				
Carrots	0.94	3.99	0.11	0.51
Parsnips	3	6.49	1.89	2.37
Brussels Sprouts	5.2	6.6	0.70	0.88
Peas	2.59	3.99	0.18	0.43
Tourtière	13.99	16.99	1.62	1.96
Fruitcake	7.99	8.99	0.62	0.79
Eggnog	2.49	3.49	0.63	0.89
Rolls	3.79	4.49	0.20	0.42
Total	92.09	116.48	9.77	12.77

Still, the upfront cost of feeding a tableful of people may be too much for the average Canadian to bear this year. Celebrations of the holidays are more joyful when shared with loved ones. The great thing about traditions is that we can establish new ones. Because of high prices we expect to see many Canadians moving away from turkey and stuffing, choosing lower cost alternatives to share with family and friends. Ham, for example, will reduce the cost of the meal to roughly \$7.79 on average. While the food may differ, the act of communal dining is the important aspect of these traditions, not the turkey itself.



Share the stress of cooking, request a dish from everyone

Of course, there are other ways of saving costs this Christmas that don't require sacrificing our most beloved meal items. A simple google search will net you thousands of dish ideas for both show-stopping side dishes and comfortable favourites. It's been a difficult year for many people with rising inflation and interest rates taking a bite out of consumers' disposable incomes. This is an opportunity to share not only the cost of the meal, but also the enjoyment, without putting too much financial and social pressure on the host or the guests.

"Amidst the rising cost of holiday meals, with some creativity, Canadians are redefining traditions, prioritizing the joy of communal dining with loved ones over the specific dishes on the table." —**Janet Music**

"As Canadians face higher food prices this holiday season, many are exploring innovative ways to celebrate, emphasizing the spirit of togetherness and shared joy, regardless of the menu on the table." —**Dr. Sylvain Charlebois**

For more information and access to the full report, please visit <https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food.html>.

About the Agri-Food Analytics Lab

The Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University is a research unit dedicated to providing valuable insights into the food and agriculture sectors. Their interdisciplinary team of experts conducts research on various aspects of the food supply chain, offering data-driven solutions to inform industry stakeholders and policymakers.

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Disclosure: Funding for the survey was provided by Dalhousie University.