CAP ACTION Center for American Progress Action Fund

Stopping Sticker Shock at the Grocery Store

A Plan to Make Food More Affordable

Food and grocery costs are the single biggest concern for voters in 2026

76% of voters name food and groceries as their No. 1 cost concern—more than utilities, health care, gas, or rent. This crosses all party lines. (74% Trump, 75% swing, 78% Harris)

On issues related to rising costs, which of the following is the biggest concern for you?

Food and groceries	76%
Utilities and energy	65%
Health care and insurance	61%
Gas to fill up your tank	48%
Rent and mortgage	46%
Property and other home taxes	44%
Clothing and household items	28%
Home insurance premiums	24%
Preschool and child care costs	12%
Airline fares and fees	7%
None of the above	2%

- **Nearly 4-in-5 (79%)** say food prices are higher than a year ago, including 50% who say prices are much higher
- **Voters worry about affordability, not availability:** 73% say prices are too high; just 19% say there aren't enough grocery stores nearby
- **High prices are changing behavior:** 64% changed what they buy; 22% skipped meals; 22% delayed other bills to cover food
- **Voters hold grocers accountable:** 66% blame major grocers raising costs; 60% blame tariffs - this blame is unique, above and beyond broader inflation

Source: CAP/Blue Rose Research, Feb. 4–7, 2026, n=3,730 national likely voters

The most resonant policies focus on immediate relief, corporate accountability, and expanding the food supply

Provide Immediate Relief

Negotiate with corporations

Hold prices flat on staples like milk, bread, and eggs

53% support

Reverse cuts to SNAP

Help low-income families afford food immediately

55% support

Increase Competition

Crack down on collusion

Between grocery chains and suppliers that drives up consumer prices

57% support

Reduce barriers to entry

For new grocery stores to boost local competition

54% support

Expand Food Supply

Invest in American farms

Equipment repair rights, credit access, and crop insurance

62% support

Invest in agricultural R&D

Increase crop yields and lower long-term prices

54% support

Important Takeaways

Promise immediate, concrete relief: voters feel prices are rising faster than they can keep up with; vague long-term solutions don't break through. Messaging that names specific items (milk, bread, eggs) and promises direct price relief consistently outperforms broader framing.

Pair corporate accountability with forward looking solutions: the strongest frames call out corporations for raising prices unfairly and offer a positive vision for American farmers. Neither works as well alone.

Food costs are seen as a federal issue—but states lead on trust and have a real opportunity

8% of voters are still undecided on which party to trust on food. Swing voters disproportionately cite groceries as their top concern.

Governors with concrete plans that save voters money—not in the years to come but in the immediate term—provide a clear picture of what to offer voters on a range of issues, and into the future.

55%

blame the Trump administration for high grocery prices

26%

blame state government—less partisan fracturing, more room to maneuver

Voters also blame:

- Major grocers (66%)
- Tariffs (60%)

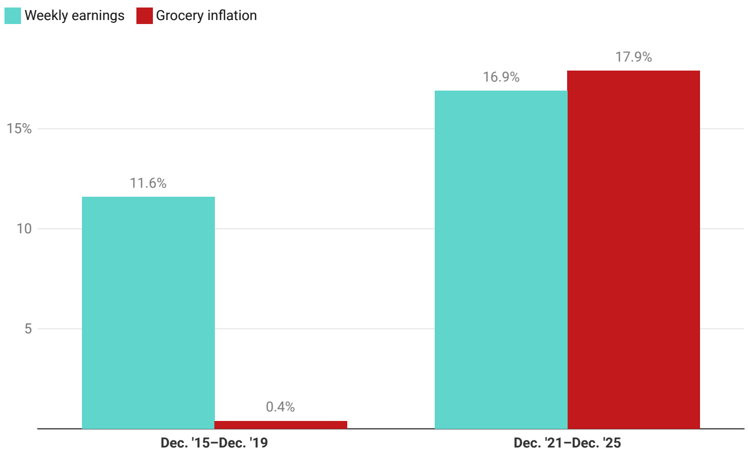
Primary source: CAP/Blue Rose Research, Feb. 4–7, 2026

Supplemental: Politico/Morning Consult (Nov. 2025); Third Way (Nov. 2025)

Why are people mad about grocery prices?

Grocery inflation outstripped the growth in weekly earnings over the past four years

Total change in average weekly earnings for production and nonsupervisory workers and in the Consumer Price Index Food at Home series, December 2015–2019 and 2021–2025



Notes: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics defines food at home as "total expenditures for food at grocery stores (or other food stores)." Data are seasonally adjusted.

Source: FRED, "Average Weekly Earnings of Production and Nonsupervisory Employees, Total Private" (last accessed January 2026); FRED, "A Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers: Food at Home in U.S. City Average" (last accessed January 2026).

Chart: Center for American Progress Action Fund.

Wages have not reliably outpaced grocery inflation.

Since the 1960s, people could usually rely on wages to grow faster than their grocery bill.

Inflation was incredibly low before the pandemic.

Despite wage growth increasing in recent years, rising food costs ate up these raises

Pillars to address food affordability

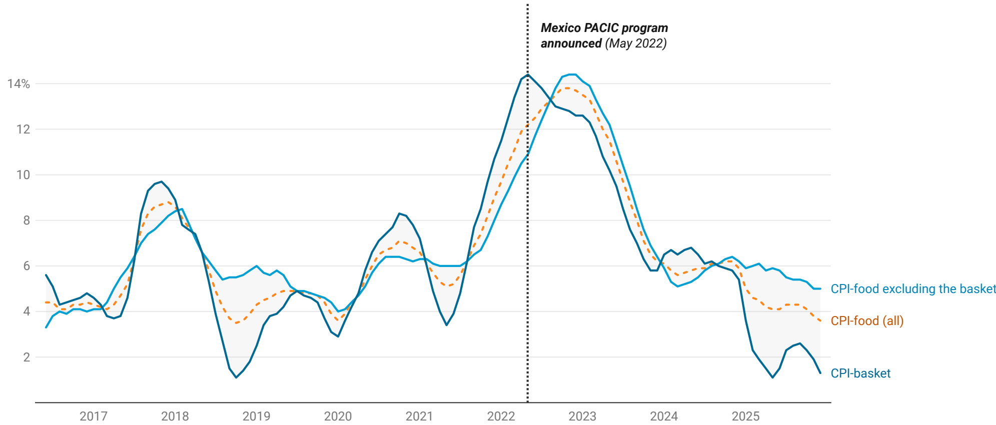
Pillar 1: Provide immediate relief through a voluntary agreement to limit price growth for core grocery products

States can implement a version of the Go-To Grocery List to provide short-term inflationary relief

- 2-year voluntary agreement to **limit price increases** for a list of household staples
- **Provide incentives** to encourage retailer participation.
  - *Nutrition incentive programs are popular with shoppers and retailers.*

Mexico's price cap appears to have restrained price growth in basic goods

Year-over-year change in a constructed consumer price index (CPI) basket, and the residual of CPI-food, six-month moving average



Notes: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics defines food at home as "total expenditures for food at grocery stores (or other food stores)." Data are seasonally adjusted.

Source: FRED, "Average Weekly Earnings of Production and Nonsupervisory Employees, Total Private" (last accessed January 2026); FRED, "A Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers: Food at Home in U.S. City Average" (last accessed January 2026).

Chart: Center for American Progress Action Fund.

Mexico's program has been **in effect since 2022** and **managed to reduce inflation**.

Pillar 2: Increase competition and protect consumers

States can protect consumers from monopolies and prevent food deserts by addressing excessive retailer power

- Restrictive covenants prevent competitors from entering local markets.
- Large retailers can exert market power to force suppliers to give them favorable deals.
- Research has tied higher market concentration to higher grocery inflation in low-income areas.
- Efforts to curtail restrictive covenants and price discrimination are already gaining attention on the state level.

Pillar 3: Modernize food and agriculture policy to prevent future price shocks

States can invest in their future by strengthening food systems

- **Recent supply shocks delayed relief from food inflation.**
  - *Bird flu, drought, natural disasters, invasion of Ukraine, and closures of trade routes.*
- **More smaller and mid-level players** mean future shocks will not hit quite as hard.
- **Providing meaningful market opportunities** to local producers can help keep the industry afloat.
  - *Local food purchases support farmers more than buying from the largest corporations.*
- **Investments in R&D at public universities** will be key to finding innovations that mitigate supply shock impacts.

Farmers already faced falling crop margins before the war

Monthly indexes for prices received by farmers and prices paid to produce crops, 1995–2026 (2011 = 100)

Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service, "Quick Stats" (last accessed April 2026).
Chart: Center for American Progress Action Fund.