

WASHINGTON (AP)—Consumers food prices next year could rise an average of 3 to 4 per cent, the same rate of increase as this year, a top Agriculture Department forecaster said today.

This year's 3 per cent increase in food prices has been

the smallest year-to-year climb in five years, following leaps in both 1973 and 1974 of 14.5 per cent and an 8.5 per cent increase last year.

In terms of what a family spends on food, considering both groceries and meals eaten out, the increases have meant

that what cost \$10 in 1972 now costs \$14.65. The forecast for 1977 means that the same \$10 worth of food will cost between \$15.09 and \$15.24 a year from now.

Rex F. Daly of the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service, who made the forecast, said 'the band of uncertainty is wide' when it comes to predicting farmers' incomes. In the end, net farm income for 1977 could be pretty much the same as the 1976 average, Daly said.

The tentative forecasts came in remarks prepared for the opening of USDA's annual four-day conference on the outlook in the coming year for farmers, farm families and grocery buyers.

Daly's predictions, based on normal weather and no surprises in the world agricultural

situation, are the first official |
ones from the department to
cover all of 1977, instead of just
the first six months. |

Daly said his projection on_
food prices rests mainly on an_
anticipated rise of 5 to 6 per.
cent next year in the cost of |
eating out at restaurants and |
other away- -from-home _ spots.
Those prices have gone up_
about 7 per cent this year over |
last.

Restaurant and other eatery |
prices account for about 20 to_ |
|

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