ChatGPT

U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Price Trends, 2020–2022

Executive Summary

From 2020 to 2022, **U.S. retail prices for fruits and vegetables rose significantly**, reflecting broad food inflation and pandemic-related supply shifts. Using USDA retail price data (including **per-pound retail prices and per–cup equivalent prices** which adjust for edible yield [1]), this briefing compares costs across product forms and identifies key trends. **Nearly all fruits and vegetables became more expensive by 2022**, though the magnitude varied widely by item and category. **Fresh produce showed especially high volatility** (some items up over 30% while a few dropped in price), whereas **canned, frozen, and dried products saw more moderate changes**. Below are key takeaways:

- **Widespread Price Increases:** Between 2020 and 2022, average fruit prices rose roughly **15%**, and vegetables about **12%**, on an unweighted basis. Out of 62 fruit products, **59 increased in price** (only 3 saw slight declines), and **84 of 93 vegetable products became more expensive**【12†】【13†】. This aligns with general food inflation over the period. Most items had **double-digit percent increases** in price, significantly raising the cost of fruits and veggies for consumers.
- **Fresh Produce Volatility: Fresh fruits and vegetables experienced the greatest volatility. Leafy greens** in particular spiked dramatically – e.g. fresh **spinach** jumped ~38% (from \$2.99 to \$4.12 per lb) [2] [3] and **romaine lettuce** rose ~27%. At the same time, a few fresh items **fell** in price: for example, fresh **red bell peppers** dropped ~13% (from \$2.16 to \$1.87 per lb) [4] [5] and some fresh tomatoes declined ~6–7%. This contrasts with processed forms, which had **smaller and more uniform changes**.
- **Processed Forms vs. Fresh: All product forms saw price increases**, but **fresh and frozen items tended to rise more steeply** than canned, dried, or juiced products. For instance, **frozen fruits** had the highest inflation (median +19% for 2020–22), while **fruit juices** saw minimal change (median ~+8%)【14†】. **Canned and dried products** generally had moderate single-digit to low-teen percentage increases【14†】. This suggests greater price pressure on perishable fresh produce during this period, whereas shelf-stable forms were somewhat more insulated.
- **Largest Increases vs. Decreases:** The **biggest price jumps** were concentrated in certain fruits (especially berries and tropical fruits) and leafy vegetables. *Examples:* frozen **raspberries** soared by **+47%** (from \$4.19 to \$6.16 per lb) [6] [7]; canned **fruit cocktail (juice-pack)** rose **+39%** [8] [9]; fresh **cherries** and **dried papaya** each climbed about **+36%** [10] [11] [12] [13]. Among vegetables, fresh **spinach** (+38%) and **kale** (+37%) were notable gainers [14] [3], along with fresh **broccoli** (+34%) and **okra** (+30%). **Price decreases were rare**, limited to a handful of items – e.g. **red peppers** (−13%) [4] [5], **canned beets** (−10%) [15] [16], **canned pumpkin** (−8%) [17] [18], and a few others saw minor dips.
- **Cost per Cup and Value:** Despite higher prices, **many fruits and vegetables remain relatively affordable per serving**. In 2022, *about half* of fruit products (30 of 62) cost **<$1 per cup-equivalent** and **~80% of vegetables** (74 of 93) cost <$1 per cup [19] [20]. (These figures were down from 2020, when ~37 fruits and 77 vegetables were under \$1 per cup, reflecting some items moving into higher cost tiers.) Notably, **high-yield items offer better value**: for example, **dried beans** remain a bargain – in 2022, **dry black beans** cost only about **\$0.24 per cup cooked**, versus **\$0.74 per cup** for canned

black beans [21] [22]. Similarly, fresh bulk produce like **watermelon** (≈\$0.24 per cup) and **potatoes** (~\$0.27 per cup) were among the cheapest sources of produce in 2022 [19] [23]. Conversely, **processed or out-of-season fruits** can be costly – e.g. **canned cherries** cost over \$3.50 per cup [19], and **frozen asparagus** around \$2.62 per cup [20] – highlighting the wide range of price efficiency across products.

Overview and Methodology

This report analyzes U.S. retail price data for fruits and vegetables in 2020 and 2022, focusing on changes in both retail purchase price and "cup-equivalent" price. Data come from the USDA Economic Research Service's **Fruit and Vegetable Prices** data product [24], which provides average retail prices (per pound or pint) and prices per **edible cup equivalent** for 150+ products. The *cup-equivalent price* represents the cost of a **dietary serving (1 cup)** of the item and accounts for inedible portions and preparation losses (using USDA yield factors). For example, if apples cost \$1.52 per pound and ~0.24 lb of edible apple equals 1 cup, the **price per cup** of apples is about \$0.41 [25] [26]. This measure allows **consistent comparisons** across product forms (fresh, canned, frozen, dried, juice) in terms of portion cost.

For this comparison, we examined **62 fruit products** and **93 vegetable products** reported in both 2020 and 2022 (covering fresh and various processed forms). We calculated year-over-year changes in average retail price and cup-equivalent price for each item. All prices are in nominal U.S. dollars and are unweighted averages (not adjusted for consumption volume). It should be noted that **2020 vs. 2022 price differences are indicative but not perfectly "like-for-like"** – the USDA cautions that differences in data collection and product mix mean these figures **"should not be used for making inferences about price changes over time."** [27] Nonetheless, the broad patterns observed give a useful picture of how produce costs evolved over this two-year period encompassing the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation of 2021–22.

Throughout the report, **retail price** refers to the average supermarket price per usual unit (e.g. per pound for fresh produce, per pint for juices), while **cup-equivalent price** refers to the price per one cup of edible product. All currency is in U.S. dollars. Figures and tables illustrate key findings, and specific examples are cited to underlying data sources. Together, these analyses highlight the **magnitude of price changes**, differences by category, and the impact on consumer cost to meet dietary recommendations.

Year-over-Year Price Trends (2020 to 2022)

Overall, fruit and vegetable prices increased substantially from 2020 to 2022. Nearly every item became more expensive, with relatively few exceptions. The **average price per edible cup** of fruit across all products rose from about **\$0.92 in 2020 to \$1.07 in 2022** (≈+16%), while the average for vegetables went from **\$0.74 to \$0.83 per cup** (≈+11%). This implies that if a consumer bought a representative mix of produce, their cost per serving of fruits and veggies in 2022 was roughly 10–15% higher than two years prior. These increases outpaced general inflation in some cases and reflect specific supply/demand factors in produce markets (e.g. weather impacts on crops, supply chain disruptions, and rising input costs).

Breaking it down by category, **fruit prices tended to rise slightly more than vegetable prices on average**. The **median fruit item** was about **13% more expensive** in 2022, compared to **11% for the median vegetable item** (unweighted). Part of this difference is due to a few fruits with very large jumps (which raise the fruit average). Indeed, **59 of 62 fruit products saw higher prices** (only three had marginal

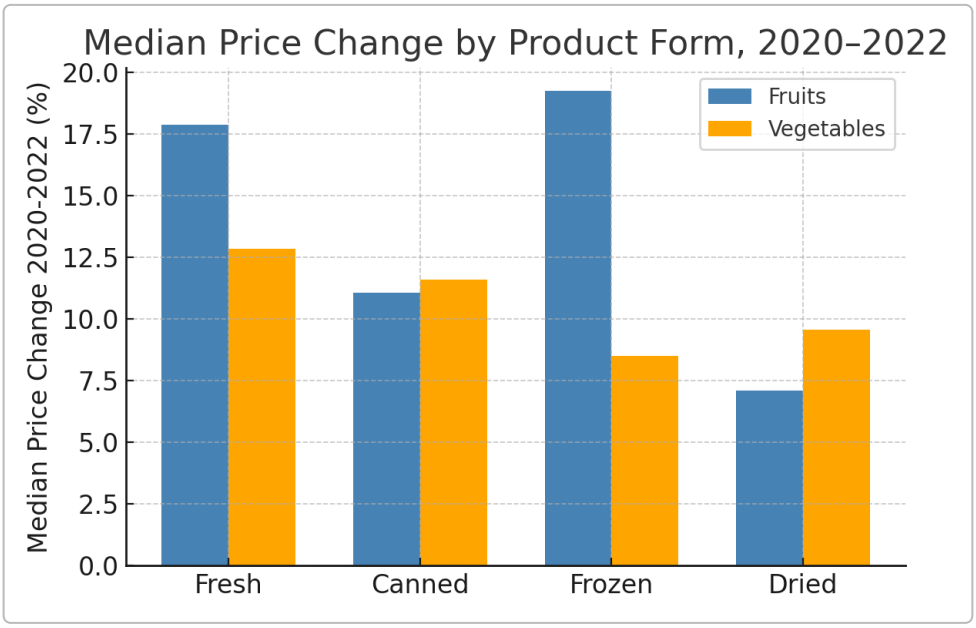
declines: e.g. frozen orange juice concentrate fell −4.6%【12†】), and **84 of 93 vegetable products had price increases** (nine showed declines, mostly in fresh/canned veg like peppers, tomatoes, and beets【13†】). Thus, consumers faced broadly higher costs in both categories, but with **more variability among vegetables**.

Fruits: Fresh fruits in general saw notable inflation. For example, common staples like **apples** (fresh) rose ~22% (from \$1.52 to \$1.85 per lb) [28] [29], **bananas** rose ~14% (still relatively cheap at \$0.60 per lb in 2022) [30] [31], and **oranges** (fresh) climbed ~20% [32] [33]. Many fresh berries and orchard fruits experienced double-digit increases (berries were especially impacted – see below). Processed fruit products varied: **canned fruits** typically rose ~8–20%, while **fruit juices** had smaller changes (single digits in many cases, with some even decreasing slightly, such as the aforementioned orange juice concentrate). **Dried fruits** were mixed: most were up modestly (e.g. raisins +5.7% [34] [35], dates +3.2% [36] [37]), except a few outliers like dried papaya which spiked. Overall, the fruit category's price trends reflect both general inflation and specific product dynamics (e.g. strong demand for berries and tropical fruits, higher transport costs for fresh imports, etc.).

Vegetables: Vegetable prices showed a wide range but generally increased at a slightly slower pace than fruits. **Fresh vegetables** were a tale of two extremes – **some leafy greens and specialty vegetables skyrocketed**, while a few items actually became cheaper. For example, **lettuce and spinach** were hit hard by supply issues (droughts and disease in 2021–22): **Iceberg lettuce** jumped ~25% (from \$0.99 to \$1.25 per lb) [38] [39], and **spinach (fresh)**, as noted, rose ~38%. **Broccoli heads** (+34% to ~\$3.08 per lb) and **kale** (+37% to \$3.43) also saw large spikes [40] [41]. In contrast, **fresh tomato prices fell** – e.g. **grape/cherry tomatoes** −6.6% [42] [43] and **round tomatoes** −6.3% [44] [45] – likely due to a rebound in supply or shifting demand. **Sweet red peppers** dropped ~13% [4] [5], bucking the inflationary trend (this might reflect increased production or competition). **Most other fresh veggies** (onions, carrots, cucumbers, potatoes, etc.) rose moderately (roughly 5–20%). Meanwhile, **canned vegetables** uniformly had modest increases in the 5–15% range, with a few exceptions (canned pumpkin, beets, olives each down 7–10%【13†】). **Frozen vegetables** also mostly saw moderate gains (e.g. frozen mixed veggies +~20%, peas +5%, green beans +2.7%), **except** products like **frozen spinach** (+6.9%) and **lima beans** (+28%) which varied. **Dried legumes** (beans, lentils) had relatively small price hikes (~9–12%), reinforcing their status as budget-friendly protein sources.

In summary, consumers in 2022 faced **noticeably higher costs for most fruits and vegetables compared to 2020**. Fresh produce tended to have the **largest year-over-year swings**, influenced by crop conditions and pandemic disruptions, whereas **processed forms (canned, frozen, dried)** provided more price stability. Next, we delve deeper into how different **product forms** fared and highlight specific products with the greatest price changes.

Comparison by Product Form (Fresh, Canned, Frozen, etc.)



Median percentage price increase from 2020 to 2022, by product form and category. Fresh and frozen fruits saw higher inflation than vegetables, while canned and dried products showed more similar modest increases. Fruit juices (not shown) had the lowest increases on average.

When comparing product forms, clear patterns emerge in the 2020–2022 price data. **Fresh fruits and vegetables generally experienced the largest price increases**, whereas **canned and dried forms saw smaller rises**. **Frozen products** were somewhat split: frozen fruits had very high inflation, while frozen vegetables were more restrained on average. The chart above illustrates median price changes for each form:

- **Fresh Produce:** Both fruits and veggies were up significantly, but fruits more so. The median fresh fruit price rose nearly **18%**, versus about **13%** for the median fresh vegetable【14†】. This reflects the extreme spikes in certain fresh fruits (e.g. cherries, mangoes, berries) and fresh vegetables (leafy greens), partly offset by a few fresh veggies that fell in price. **Fresh items are subject to weather and seasonal volatility**, which likely contributed to the larger swings. Consumers thus saw fresh produce prices fluctuate the most, with some favorites becoming much pricier by 2022.
- **Canned Products: Canned fruits** and **canned vegetables** showed fairly comparable, moderate inflation (around **11–17%** on average for fruits, and **~11%** for veggies)【14†】. Many canned goods are processed from stable supplies or imports, buffering extreme volatility. For example, canned peaches, pears, and pineapple rose about 10–15% in price, while canned tomatoes and corn were up ~5–11%. A few canned vegetables even dropped in price (as noted, e.g. beets, pumpkin). In general, **canned goods provided a more stable cost option**, with predictable modest increases in this period.
- **Frozen Products:** This category diverged between fruits and vegetables. **Frozen fruits had the highest median increase (~19%) of any form**【14†】. Several frozen fruits (often used in smoothies and desserts) saw sharp hikes – notably frozen berries (raspberries, blueberries, blackberries) which were in very high demand. In contrast, **frozen vegetables** had a median increase of only

~8.5%【14†】, the lowest among vegetable forms. Many frozen veggies (peas, mixed vegetables, etc.) remained near flat or only slightly up in price. The differing behavior might be due to supply factors (frozen fruit supply chain constraints vs. ample storage of frozen veg). For consumers, it meant **frozen veggies continued to be a cost-effective choice**, while **frozen fruits became considerably more expensive** by 2022.

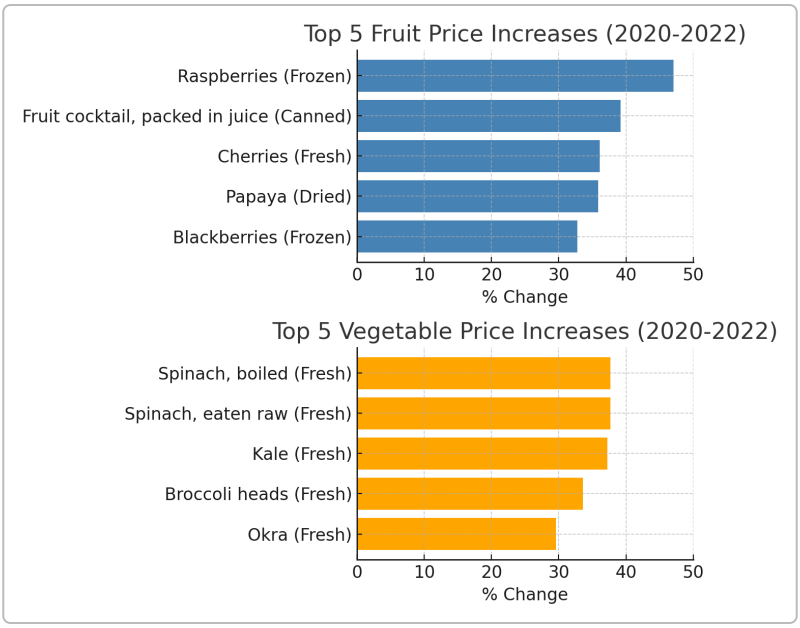
- **Dried Products: Dried fruits** and **dry beans/legumes** saw the smallest price changes overall. Median dried fruit prices were up ~7–10%, and dried beans ~9%【14†】. These items (e.g. raisins, dried apricots, lentils, pinto beans) are shelf-stable and bulk-produced, with pricing that tends to be more stable over time. For example, the price of **raisins** increased only slightly (from \$3.78 to \$3.99 per lb) [34] [35], and **dried pinto beans** actually remained very cheap (up from \$1.29 to \$1.42 per lb, still only ~$0.22 per cup cooked) [46] [47]. Dried products thus continue to offer great value, and their prices were less affected by short-term disruptions.

- **Juices:** (Note: Juices are a fruit-only category.) **Fruit juices** had the lowest increases of any form – only around +8% median【14†】. Prices for common juices like apple juice, orange juice, grape juice saw minimal change (in some cases <5%). For instance, **ready-to-drink apple juice** rose ~11% (from \$0.78 to \$0.87 per pint) [26] [29], and **orange juice (not from concentrate)** was up ~7.4% [48] [49]. One juice form, **frozen concentrates**, even dropped in price (orange concentrate −4.6%【12†】). Abundant fruit juice concentrate supplies and contract pricing likely kept juice prices stable. This made **100% juices the least inflation-affected way to get fruit**, though they lack the fiber of whole fruits nutritionally.

In summary, **fresh and frozen fruits led price inflation**, while **canned, dried, and many frozen vegetables offered relative stability**. Shoppers adapting to these shifts might opt for more canned/frozen veggies or juices to manage costs, as those categories had smaller price jumps than fresh produce. The next section highlights the individual products with the most dramatic changes.

Top Price Increases and Decreases (Notable Products)

While most produce became costlier in 2022, the magnitude varied – **some items saw extreme hikes**, far above the average, and a few saw price drops. Identifying these outliers is important for consumers and policymakers, as they indicate where affordability changed the most. Below we list **the products with the largest price increases** and those with significant decreases between 2020 and 2022:



Products with the greatest retail price increases from 2020 to 2022. Bars show percent increase in average retail price. Many of the top gainers were fresh leafy greens or berries (for vegetables and fruits respectively). Note: Spinach appears twice as "eaten raw" vs "boiled" but both entries reflect the same underlying item (spinach) experiencing ~38% inflation.

- **Top Fruit Increases:** The **highest fruit price surges** were seen in berries and processed fruit mixes. **Frozen raspberries** jumped about **+47%** – the single largest increase among fruits [6] [7], making an already pricey item (cost per cup) even more expensive. Next was **canned fruit cocktail (juice-packed)** at **+39%** [8] [9]; this mix of fruits went from ~\$0.93 to \$1.29 per cup [50] [51], possibly due to higher syrup/juice costs and fruit content costs. **Fresh sweet cherries** (often price-volatile) rose ~**36%** [10] [11], reaching an average of \$4.66 per lb in 2022. **Dried papaya** also spiked ~**36%** [52] [53], indicating import cost increases for tropical dried fruit. Other notable gainers were **frozen blackberries** (+33%) and **fresh nectarines** (+24%) – these didn't make the top-five chart, but still far exceeded the typical fruit inflation. It's worth noting that **several of the steepest increases were in processed forms (frozen, canned, dried)**, suggesting specific supply chain issues (e.g. cold storage or canning costs) in addition to fresh fruit supply problems.
- **Top Vegetable Increases:** The **steepest vegetable price hikes** were dominated by **fresh greens**. As shown above, **spinach** was hit hardest – both the **fresh bunch spinach** (sold for cooking) and **fresh pre-washed spinach** (for salads) increased about **+37.6%** [2] [3]. By 2022, fresh spinach averaged \$4.12 per lb, versus \$2.99 in 2020. **Fresh kale** was close behind at **+37%** [54] [55], reflecting similar supply issues (kale at \$3.43 in 2022, up from \$2.50). **Broccoli (crowns/heads)** rose ~**+34%** [56] [57], possibly due to weather impacts in major growing regions. An outlier in processed veggies was **frozen turnip greens**, up ~29% (this item is less common; a small base price jump can yield a large percent). Rounding out the top increases, **fresh okra** jumped ~**+30%** [58] [59], and **fresh collard greens** +~15% (collards were actually overtaken by some processed items like frozen limas +28%, but in general leafy greens led). These surges in nutrient-dense greens are concerning for nutrition assistance programs, as they can constrain access to healthy options.
- **Price Decreases:** Amid overall inflation, **a few products became cheaper**. On the fruit side, declines were trivial – e.g. **fresh blueberries** dipped −0.4%【12†】 (essentially flat) and **dried mango** fell

−2.4%【12†】, changes so small shoppers wouldn't notice. The **meaningful drops all occurred in vegetables**. **Fresh red bell peppers** saw the largest cut, about **−13%**【13†】, bringing the price down to \$1.87/lb in 2022 from over \$2.16. This might be due to expanded greenhouse production or seasonal oversupply. Various **canned vegetables** also fell: **canned beets** (−9.9%)【13†】, **canned pumpkin** (−7.6%)【13†】, **canned olives** (−7.3%)【13†】, and **canned potatoes** (−7.3%)【13†】 all saw notable price relief. In most cases these are smaller categories, but it suggests some processed veg benefited from lower input costs or demand shifts. **Fresh tomatoes** (grape/cherry and slicing types) dropping ~6% were also significant, given tomatoes' broad use. Consumers of those specific items would have experienced a modest break in 2022, even as most other produce strained their budgets.

In essence, the biggest price swings underscore **which foods' supply chains were most disrupted**. Berries and leafy greens are perishable and seasonal, making them vulnerable to shocks (hence large spikes), whereas some canned goods actually saw **competitive pricing or demand dips** that led to lower prices. For policymakers, these extremes highlight the need to monitor certain food sub-sectors for volatility. For consumers, it suggests adjusting shopping habits – e.g. substituting **more stable-priced items** (like carrots, apples, or canned veggies) for those that saw huge run-ups (like fresh berries or salad greens) during periods of rapid inflation.

Notable Shifts in Price Efficiency and Affordability

Beyond raw price changes, it's important to consider **"price efficiency" – the cost of edible portions and meeting dietary goals.** By examining **cup-equivalent prices** and yields, we can see how far a dollar goes for different produce items, and how that changed from 2020 to 2022:

- **Affordable Choices (<\$0.50 per cup):** In 2020, 12 fruits and 25 vegetables cost **\$0.50 or less per cup**. By 2022, those counts dropped to 9 fruits and 19 vegetables【30†】, as some items edged above the \$0.50 mark. Still, consumers had a range of very affordable options. In 2022 the **cheapest fruit per serving** was **watermelon** at ~\$0.24 per cup (fresh watermelon was \$0.33/lb with ~90% edible yield) [19]. **Apple juice from concentrate** was also very cheap (~\$0.30 per cup) [19]. For vegetables, **starchy staples** led the low-cost list – a **baked potato** cost only ~\$0.27 per cup equivalent (since a whole potato yields a lot of edible volume) [23], and **iceberg lettuce** was about \$0.32 per cup [23]. **Onions, carrots, cabbage, and dry beans** also remained under \$0.50/cup. These foods provide a lot of volume per dollar, and despite inflation, they stayed very budget-friendly in 2022.
- **Moderate Cost (\$0.50–\$1 per cup):** The majority of items fell in this range. **About 48% of fruits (30 of 62)** and **~80% of veggies (74 of 93)** were under **\$1 per cup in 2022** [19] [20]. This includes things like fresh apples (~\$0.50/cup), bananas (~\$0.27/cup), broccoli (~\$0.94/cup), and canned tomatoes (~\$0.55/cup). However, inflation did push several items that were previously under \$1 into slightly higher cost territory. For instance, **fresh grapes** increased to ~\$1.36 per cup [60] (up from \$1.10 [61]), and **romaine lettuce** to ~\$0.51–\$0.81 per cup (varieties just over \$0.50) [62]. Generally, though, most common fruits and veggies could still be obtained at under one dollar per serving, which is encouraging from a nutrition standpoint. The data suggest that even with price hikes, **eating fruits and vegetables can be done on a budget**, especially by focusing on the many items in this mid-cost range.
- **High Cost (>\$1 per cup):** A subset of produce items are relatively expensive per cup, often due to low yields (inedible parts), high processing costs, or import status. In 2022, notable **high-cost fruits**

included fresh **blackberries (~\$2.25/cup)**, **raspberries (~\$2.58/cup)**, and **canned cherries (~\$3.56/cup)** [19] – the latter being the priciest fruit surveyed. These were luxury items for many households. On the **vegetable side**, fewer items topped \$1 per cup; the most expensive was **frozen asparagus (~\$2.62 per cup)** [63], followed by things like artichokes and red peppers (which hovered around \$1–\$1.60 per cup). These high costs per serving did not necessarily change drastically in percentage terms from 2020, but their absolute prices rose further, potentially putting them further out of reach. For example, fresh asparagus went from about \$2.47 to \$2.62 per cup (+6%) over the period [63] – already expensive, and more so in 2022.

- **Yield and "Cup Conversion" effects:** Because yields (the edible fraction) stayed constant, the **relative cost-efficiency ranking of foods remained mostly the same** – inflation tended to raise all boats. However, items with low edible yield (e.g. fruits with heavy rinds or canned products packed in liquid) continue to deliver less edible volume per dollar. For instance, **canned fruit in syrup** often has only ~65% edible fruit (the rest is syrup), which yields a high cup price. In 2022, **canned peaches in syrup** cost ~\$1.36 per cup [64], versus ~\$0.78 per cup for fresh peaches [65]. That gap widened slightly from 2020 [66]. On the other hand, foods that **expand when prepared** (like dried beans, rice, lentils) remain extremely cost-efficient. The earlier example of **dry vs. canned beans** illustrates this: one pound of dry black beans (~\$1.53 in 2022) yields about 2.47 pounds of cooked beans (roughly 6 cups), so only ~\$0.24 per cup [67]. Canned black beans cost \$1.24 per lb but much of that is water weight (65% yield), yielding ~2 cups per lb, so ~\$0.74 per cup [22]. This is unchanged in mechanism from 2020, but the relative **value advantage of cooking from dry increased** because canned bean prices rose ~20% vs. ~11% for dry beans. Similar patterns hold for other legumes and for **dried vs. fresh fruit** (dried fruit is expensive per pound but a small serving is very nutrient-dense). The key point is that items which were **cheapest per serving remain so**, and those that were costly remain at the top end – but the absolute dollar differences grew. Consumers watching their food budget can thus still prioritize high-yield, lower-cost-per-cup foods (like **potatoes, beans, apples, bananas**), which saw only modest price upticks, to maximize nutrition per dollar.

Product Categories with Greatest Volatility

Looking at broad categories, the data reveal that certain **groups of produce were far more volatile** in price than others over 2020–2022. This volatility often ties to supply sensitivities:

- **Leafy Greens & Lettuce (High Volatility):** As noted, the salad/leafy green category saw **some of the largest swings**. This group (spinach, kale, lettuces, collards, etc.) was hit by **converging factors** – disease outbreaks (e.g. lettuce crop virus), drought in California, and labor shortages – causing reduced supply and surging prices [3] [68]. Spinach and kale climbed ~30–40%; even cabbage rose ~15%. However, these are also the items that can drop if a bumper crop occurs (indeed, lettuce had been inexpensive in 2018–2019 and could become so again). **Volatility is inherent in leafy greens**, meaning consumers and programs (like school meals) need to budget for possible spikes.
- **Berries and Orchard Fruit (High Volatility):** Fruits like **berries, cherries, and peaches** showed high price variability. Berries, being delicate and seasonal, saw huge demand during the pandemic (for their perceived health benefits), straining supply. Hence frozen and fresh berries had outsized inflation (15–47% increases). **Cherry prices** are notorious for fluctuating year to year, and 2022 was high. Meanwhile, more stable fruits like **citrus and apples** had lower volatility – e.g. apples were up ~22%, oranges ~20%, which, while significant, is closer to overall inflation. **Bananas** (largely imported) were quite stable (+13%) given they rely on long-term contracts. So within fruits, **specialty and seasonal fruits were more volatile** than staple fruits.

- **Starchy & Tropical Vegetables (Lower Volatility): Root crops and starches** (potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, onions) generally had smaller price movements, often <15%. For example, **fresh potatoes** rose only ~+22 cents per lb (+22%) over two years [69] [70], and carrots ~+12% for fresh, +6% for frozen. These crops store well or have multiple harvests, smoothing prices. **Tropical vegetables** like avocados and okra did see some jumps (avocado +19.6% [71] [72], okra +30%), but the volatility in vegetables was most pronounced in the **fresh green vegetable category** (as discussed).
- **Legumes and Dry Goods (Very Stable):** The **bean/legume category** was remarkably stable in price. Dried beans, lentils, and split peas had among the smallest changes (+8–12%), and canned beans only slightly higher. **Peanut butter (not in our dataset)**, often included in similar discussions, also had moderate inflation ~9% (per other USDA data). This stability in plant protein sources is good news for consumers seeking cheaper protein alternatives during meat inflation. It highlights that **commodity crops with good storage and multiple sourcing options are less prone to sudden price swings**.
- **Processed vs. Fresh Volatility:** In general, **fresh produce prices were more volatile** than processed. As we saw, almost all the top increases were fresh items, and processed items dominated the list of price declines. Canning and freezing operations even out supply variability by building inventory, so price swings are muted. The data reinforce that for those worried about price fluctuations, **canned and frozen fruits/vegetables offer predictability**. However, fresh produce – while often preferred for taste – can be subject to boom-and-bust pricing. This suggests an opportunity for policy to improve supply chain resilience for fresh produce (through improved storage, diversification of growing regions, etc.).

Overall, the categories with the **greatest volatility were fresh, perishable products** (leafy greens, berries, etc.), whereas **shelf-stable categories (dried foods, canned goods) and widely grown staples (root vegetables, apples)** had the least volatility. Consumers who are flexible can switch between fresh and processed forms depending on current prices – e.g. using more frozen spinach when fresh spinach prices soar – to mitigate the impact of these swings.

Conclusion

The period from 2020 to 2022 brought **significant cost increases for fruits and vegetables in the U.S.**, averaging in the low double-digits percent-wise. This briefing highlighted that **while all types of produce became pricier, the extent varied by form and type**: fresh produce, especially leafy greens and berries, had **pronounced inflation**, whereas many canned, frozen, and dried products saw milder changes. A few items even defied the inflationary trend with price drops, though these were exceptions.

From a consumer perspective, these findings underscore the importance of **flexibility and smart substitutions** to maintain fruit and vegetable intake despite rising prices. Many **affordable options (under \$0.50 or \$1 per serving)** are still available – such as apples, bananas, carrots, cabbage, potatoes, and beans – which remained relatively low-cost and saw only modest inflation. By focusing on these and buying in-season or opting for frozen/canned alternatives during fresh price spikes, consumers can stretch their food dollars further.

For policymakers and nutrition assistance programs, the data suggests a need to monitor produce prices closely and perhaps adjust benefits or guidance when key healthy foods become significantly more expensive. The volatility in certain fresh produce also points to **supporting agricultural resilience** (through

crop diversification, import strategies, or controlled environment agriculture) to stabilize prices. Interventions like subsidies or targeted coupons for high-inflation items (e.g. vouchers for leafy greens) could help ensure low-income families can afford a variety of fruits and vegetables even as prices fluctuate.

In summary, **the 2020–2022 period was challenging for produce affordability**, but the impact was uneven across products. Consumers and stakeholders can use this analysis to identify which fruits and veggies offer the best value and which ones may require extra attention due to their rising costs. Keeping diets rich in fruits and vegetables is crucial for public health, so mitigating the effects of price increases – through informed choices and supportive policies – remains an important goal moving forward.

Sources: Analysis based on USDA Economic Research Service data for 2020 and 2022 [73], including retail scanner price averages and cup-equivalent conversions. Additional context from USDA Charting data on 2022 produce costs [19] [20]. All price figures are nominal.

---

[1] [24] [27] [73] Fruit and Vegetable Prices | Economic Research Service
http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/fruit-and-vegetable-prices

[2] [4] [14] [15] [17] [21] [38] [40] [42] [44] [46] [54] [56] [58] [69] [71] Vegetable Prices 2020.csv
file://file-9qdaUv4MhigTAArQwKUbYc

[3] [5] [16] [18] [22] [39] [41] [43] [45] [47] [55] [57] [59] [67] [68] [70] [72] Vegetable-Prices-2022.csv
file://file-9ZNKRNiUb5T96kjJVg7nEJ

[6] [8] [10] [12] [25] [26] [28] [30] [32] [34] [36] [48] [50] [52] [61] [66] Fruit Prices 2020.csv
file://file-ANbsAFuHseW46XUjgzGJJY

[7] [9] [11] [13] [29] [31] [33] [35] [37] [49] [51] [53] [60] [64] [65] Fruit-Prices-2022.csv
file://file-XZAUqHctKGGpjZewDsWkEY

[19] Retail fruit costs ranged from 24 cents to $3.56 per cup equivalent in 2022 | Economic Research Service
http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=109752

[20] [23] [62] [63] Vegetable prices ranged from 22 cents to $2.62 per cup equivalent in 2022 | Economic Research Service
http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=109242