

10 Simple Garden Strategies to Lower Food Costs Now

Learning from Row Home Gardens and Suburban Soil in Pennsylvania — Practical Strategies to Lower Basic Food Costs, by Jon Barrett, a Google Scholar author and technical content writer



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania May 1, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - **Imagine standing in a local grocery store or chain supermarket, realizing your grocery bill is higher than ever** — for the same few food items you just bought last week. Millions of families across the United States, both urban and rural, are facing the same pricing anxiety at the checkout line. According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), food costs have surged in recent years, outpacing wage growth and altering how people budget for basic needs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). This issue is changing household spending habits, forcing some to cut back on medication, skip meals, or postpone large purchases. From students and parents to fixed-income seniors, increasing food prices are not just a number; they represent a growing food security crisis affecting families throughout the United States.

Barrett spent most of his life in **the Greater Philadelphia area**, where he experienced firsthand the challenges and rewards of growing food — starting in narrow row home gardens in the northeast section of the city and later across larger suburban and rural plots in Pennsylvania (B. Linker, personal communication, August 1, 1976; V. Giorgi, personal communication, August 1, 1976; J. Koones & T. Vanim, personal communication, June 1, 1987). From backyard organic composting with eggshells, coffee grounds, and biodegradable tea leaves to raising pheasants, tilling soil with many farm tractors, observing honey bees take off for food sources using the Sun as a guide, and helping plant rows of cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, green beans, grapes, pumpkins, and watermelon, he learned how food systems work — and how fragile they become when disrupted.

(This Article is also published on [Patch.com in Philadelphia](https://patch.com/philadelphia), and Medium: [10 Simple Garden Strategies to Lower Food Costs Now](https://www.issuewire.com) where readers are learning these strategies and tips!)

One of his earliest jobs was working with his brother at a local corner mini market, where he operated a **small produce stand** during summer breaks from school. He learned quickly how to sort fruits and vegetables, check for freshness and imperfections, and arrange items using planogram-style displays to catch the eye of a potential new customer or an existing one. **The produce stand setup was humble** — long, heavy wooden planks balanced on plastic milk crates, bordered by two old, analog scales with chains and metal baskets. Transactions were made by punching color-coded keys on a vintage, mechanical cash register and pulling down the side-mounted handle to sound the ringer and open the till to complete the sale. Yellow jackets, wasps, and flies hovered nearby, kept in check by a plastic-and-metal fly swatter that never left their side. They experimented with pricing strategies, neighborhood discounts, and product placement — all of which enhanced Barrett's work ethic and marketing skills and deepened his respect for food accessibility and food costs. In addition, he also worked in a supermarket deli and produce sections and gained even more valuable skills with food sources, safe food handling, logistics, expiration dates, tare weights, and customer insights.

Several factors have contributed to the sharp rise in food prices. COVID-19 disrupted the global supply chain, causing spikes in production and transportation costs (Mahmood et al., 2024). Fuel prices surged, which increased farm input expenses, delivery rates, and storage fees (Diab & Karaki, 2023). On top of that, a widespread outbreak of avian influenza decimated poultry populations, especially egg-laying hens — turning a simple carton of eggs into a near luxury (USDA, 2025b). Families aren't just facing higher grocery bills — they're cutting essentials to cope (Feeding America, 2025). In conversations with family and friends, many say they are buying less meat, skipping medications, reducing or eliminating entertainment costs, and delaying retirement savings just to afford groceries.

While global supply chain issues certainly contribute, we also have opportunities in the United States to ease the pressure on our food sources and reduce food prices. Across the United States, outdated and misaligned local and state policies continue to create unintended burdens for farmers and food growers in both urban and rural communities. Taxed food staples such as vegetables, fruits, eggs, and milk; taxed farmland; and taxed farm equipment continue to burden farmers and local growers. Limited access to affordable energy, outdated land use laws, and zoning that restricts community gardens and both personal and commercial honey bee hives — even in low-density neighborhoods — make growing and distributing food close to the communities that need healthy and accessible food sources far more difficult (J. Koones & T. Vanim, personal communication, June 1, 1987).

As food prices rise and household budgets tighten, practical, community-driven strategies and solutions can help make fresh, healthy food more affordable for everyone — while moving us closer to achieving long-term food sustainability. **Based on experience in both row home gardens and rural farmlands, here are ten actionable strategies:**

- 1. Remove sales tax from basic grocery items** like eggs, milk, vegetables, and fruit.
- 2. Lower or eliminate taxes** on farming equipment, garden tools, and land used for food production.
- 3. Reduce fuel and utility costs** for agricultural purposes, especially for small-scale and local growers.
- 4. Expand incentives** for solar panels, battery storage, and sustainable technology in urban and rural farms alike (USDA, 2025a).
- 5. Fund and protect pollinator populations**, such as honey bees, which are essential to fruit and vegetable crops (J. Koones & T. Vanim, personal communication, June 1, 1987).

6. Create and support community gardens, backyard gardens, and row home gardens in all neighborhoods, urban and rural (Bieri et al., 2024; B. Linker, personal communication, August 1, 1976; V. Giorgi, personal communication, August 1, 1976).

7. Modernize local land and zoning laws so people can grow food, raise chickens, or plant orchards where appropriate.

8. Encourage vertical farming in urban and suburban communities to bring food closer to consumers (USDA Agricultural Research Service, 2025a).

9. Promote sustainability by recycling eggshells, coffee grounds, and tea leaves as natural fertilizers, and use Biodegradable Plant Containers (Holmes et al., 2011; B. Linker, personal communication, August 1, 1976).

10. Revitalize vacant land through community gardens and educational urban agriculture programs, such as the 4-H organization (4-H, 2023).

Before planting any garden — whether in a backyard, vacant lot, or urban plot — gardeners must ensure the soil is safe and healthy for growing food. Prior to starting any digging project — whether for a backyard garden, fence post, or raised bed — **residential, commercial, and industrial property owners are required to call 811. This national “call before you dig” 811 hotline** connects you to local utility companies who will mark underground lines to prevent dangerous and costly accidents. The call and service are free and required by law in many states. Taking this simple step ensures your gardening plans don’t unintentionally disrupt water, gas, electric, or internet services beneath the soil.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) advises that before starting a garden, gardeners should assess the site’s history and conduct soil testing for potential contamination from lead, asbestos, mercury, oil, PCBs, and other hazardous materials (EPA, 2011c). Healthy soil is essential for plant growth, as it holds water, contains beneficial organisms, and provides necessary nutrients.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides specific guidelines for the excavation of contaminated soil to reduce human exposure to hazardous materials. For residential areas, the EPA typically recommends removing soil to a depth of 12 inches to minimize direct contact risks, particularly for children who may play in yards (EPA, 2011b). In areas intended for gardening — especially where edible plants will be grown — a deeper excavation of 24 inches is advised to prevent plant roots from reaching contaminated layers (EPA, 2011a). When contamination extends beyond 24 inches, the EPA may choose not to excavate further but instead implement engineering controls, such as physical barriers, or institutional controls like land use restrictions to safely limit exposure without full removal of deeper contaminated soil (EPA, 2011a).

Natural and bioremediation strategies can help restore soil health and reduce toxicity. These strategies include adding organic matter, such as compost, eggshells, coffee grounds, tea leaves, or manure, which improves soil quality by enhancing nutrient content and structure. (Holmes et al., 2011; Linker, personal communication, August 1, 1976). Another effective technique is phytoremediation, which uses plants to absorb, stabilize, or extract contaminants from the soil. Cultivating hyperaccumulator plants like sunflowers and Indian mustard can extract heavy metals like lead from the soil (Patil & Chikhalikar, 2023). Biochar can increase phytoremediation in removing heavy metals from soils (Deka, Patwa, Nair, & Ravi, 2024). Mycoremediation techniques using fungi such as oyster mushrooms help degrade pollutants and absorb heavy metals (Dinakarkumar, Ramakrishnan, Gujjula, Vasu, Balamurugan, & Murali, 2024). Adjusting soil pH to near neutral levels can also increase nutrient

availability and support microbial populations (EPA, 2011c).

In addition, deer and other wildlife can damage gardens and crops, often **requiring fencing, netting, or other physical barriers and deterrents**. Some **low-cost solutions** for wildlife deterrence include the following:

1. **Fishing Line Fence** — Stringing fishing line around the perimeter at varying heights can confuse and deter deer.
2. **DIY Netting** — Reuse old window screens, mesh fabric, or bird netting over beds and seedlings.
3. **Motion-Activated Sprinklers** — Inexpensive versions start under \$30 and harmlessly scare off animals.
4. **Reflective Deterrents** — Use pie tins, old CDs, or Mylar tape to reflect light and deter birds and squirrels, and hang them from the ground.
5. **Scent-Based Repellents** — DIY garlic, chili, or soap sprays can discourage nibbling (safe for plants).
6. **Repurposed Fencing** — Old wooden pallets, wire mesh, or leftover lattice panels can be upcycled into barriers.
7. **Companion Planting** — Plant strong-scented herbs like mint or chives along garden borders to repel pests.

With some research and preparation, gardens can be safely and easily grown in urban areas. Neighbors have transformed tiny backyards into vibrant gardens filled with vegetables and fruits. A few compost bins, recycled rain barrels, and some maintenance can lead to seasonal harvests that lower grocery bills and provide families with immediate access to fresh, healthy food. In rural towns across the United States, families often produced enough to feed relatives, store food for the winter, and share the surplus with neighbors. Sometimes, that extra produce even created opportunities for children to set up produce stands — just like the one Barrett and his brother operated during summer breaks.

Philadelphia is home to thousands of vacant lots, which present opportunities for urban agriculture and community development. Programs like FarmPhilly, operated by Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, support urban farming projects on city land, including community gardens and youth education gardens (City of Philadelphia, n.d.). These initiatives help residents grow food, share gardening skills, and strengthen community ties. Additionally, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides funding to support community gardens in Philadelphia, enhancing local food systems and promoting sustainable land use (USDA NRCS Pennsylvania, 2023). By transforming vacant lots into productive green spaces, these programs contribute to food security, neighborhood revitalization, and food sustainability.

Gardens offer far more than food — they can help build healthier, safer communities and may even increase nearby property values over time. Growing high-quality fruits and vegetables at home or in community plots increases access to fresh, nutritious food, often improving dietary habits and long-term health. The physical activity involved in planting, watering, and harvesting supports exercise and cardiovascular well-being, while the calming nature of gardening contributes to reduced stress and improved mental health (Soga et al., 2017). Community gardens also help strengthen

neighborhood identity by bringing people together with a shared purpose, creating spaces that are greener, safer, and more welcoming. They offer hands-on education for both children and adults — teaching skills in biology, sustainability, and self-reliance. For youth, gardens can provide structure, mentorship, and positive engagement, all of which help deter crime and support emotional development. In some cases, families can generate modest income from surplus produce or farmers' markets. And over time, well-kept garden spaces have even been shown to increase nearby property values, turning underused land into sources of beauty, growth, and economic opportunity (Draper & Freedman, 2010).

Food affordability will not solve itself. The answers already grow in backyards, on vacant lots, and in the hands of people who care about their neighborhoods. Based on firsthand experience tilling both urban and rural soil, the potential is clear. When policies and outdated regulations that make growing and sharing food harder for families are changed, we will be one big step closer to building stronger, healthier communities — together.

Let's get growing, because planting a garden can save you money, provide you with exercise, stimulate your brain, and bring your family together.

“Sun, soil, seeds, and sweat — the original supply chain.” quote by Jon Barrett

Do you Know a Family Member, friend, or neighbor growing food locally? Pass this article along and grow together!

About the Author:

Jon Barrett is a Google Scholar Author and a technical content writer with over a decade of experience in SEO content copywriting, technical content writing, and digital marketing. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Temple University, along with MicroBachelors academic credentials in both Marketing and Academic and Professional Writing (Thomas Edison State University, 2025).

His professional technical writing covers industrial hygiene, real estate, construction, and property insurance hazards and has been featured in the Journal of Loss Prevention in the Process Industries, Industrial Safety & Hygiene News, the American Society of Safety Professionals, EHS Daily Advisor, and Facilities Management Advisor.

Google Scholar Author: https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=BcLad_kAAAAJ

Linkedin Profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jon-barrett-129bb9b/>

Personal Website: <https://barrettrestore.wixsite.com/jonwebsite>

Google Certified Digital Marketer

(This Article is also published on Patch.com in Philadelphia, and Medium: [10 Simple Garden Strategies to Lower Food Costs Now](#) where readers are learning these strategies and tips!)

References

Bieri, D., Joshi, N., Wende, W., & Kleinschroth, F. (2024). Increasing demand for urban community gardening before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 92,

128206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2024.128206>

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025, March 12). Consumer Price Index — Northeast Region. <https://www.bls.gov/regions/mi...>

City of Philadelphia. (n.d.). Gardening — FarmPhilly. <https://www.phila.gov/programs...>

Deka, D., Patwa, D., Nair, A. M., & Ravi, K. (2024). Influence of biochar amendment on removal of heavy metal from soils using phytoremediation by *Catharanthus roseus* L. and *Chrysopogon zizanioides* L. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research International*, 31(40), 53552–53569. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-024-34734-4>

Diab, S., & Karaki, M. (2023). Do increases in gasoline prices cause higher food prices? *Energy Economics*, Volume 127, Part B, 2023, 107066, ISSN 0140–9883. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2023.107066>

Dinakarkumar, Y., Ramakrishnan, G., Gujjula, K. R., Vasu, V., Balamurugan, P., & Murali, G. (2024). Fungal bioremediation: An overview of the mechanisms, applications and future perspectives. *Environmental Chemistry and Ecotoxicology*, 6, 293–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2024.07.002>

Draper, C., & Freedman, D. (2010). Review and analysis of the benefits, purposes, and motivations associated with community gardening in the United States. *Journal of Community Practice*, 18(4), 458–492. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2010.519682>

Feeding America. (2025). Hunger in America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org...>

Giorgi, V. (1976, August 1). Personal communication.

Holmes, J. D., Sawyer, J. E., Kassel, P., & Ruiz Diaz, D. (2011, November 29). Using ground eggshells as a liming material in corn and soybean production. *Crop Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1094/CM-2011-1129-01-RS>

Koones, J., & Vanim, T. (1987, June 1). Personal communication.

Linker, B. (1976, August 1). Personal communication.

Mahmood, H., Furqan, M., Meraj, G., & Hassan, M. S. (2024). The effects of COVID-19 on agriculture supply chain, food security, and environment: A review. *PeerJ*, 12: e17281. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.17281>

Patil, V. V., & Chikhalikar, K. K. (2023). Phytoremediation potential of sunflowers and mustard in lead-contaminated soils: A case study. *International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology (IRJET)*, 10(9), 475–479. <https://www.irjet.net/archives/V10/i9/IRJET-V10I9100.pdf>

Soga, M., Gaston, K. J., & Yamaura, Y. (2017). Gardening is beneficial for health: A meta-analysis. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 5, 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.007>

United States Department of Agriculture. (Updated 2025, January 10). Agricultural Research Service:

Vertical Farming — No Longer A Futuristic Concept.

<https://www.ars.usda.gov/oc/utm/vertical-farming-no-longer-a-futuristic-concept/>

United States Department of Agriculture. (2025, April 4). AMS Livestock & Poultry Program, Livestock, Poultry, and Grain Market News Division: Egg Markets Overview. https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/ams_3725.pdf

United States Department of Agriculture NRCS Pennsylvania. (2023). NRCS funds community gardens in Philadelphia.

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/pennsylvania/news/nrcs-funds-community-gardens-in>

United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2011). Brownfields and urban agriculture: Interim guidelines for safe gardening practices. <https://semspub.epa.gov/work/05/940518.pdf>

United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2011). Urban Gardening: Assessing soil contamination and improving safety. https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf

United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2011). Urban Gardening: Tips for Safe Gardening in Urban Areas.

https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf

4-H. (2023). National 4-H Council. <https://4-h.org/>

Intellectual Property Notice:

This submission and all accompanying materials, including the article and cited research, are the original intellectual property of the author, Jon Barrett. These materials are submitted exclusively by Jon Barrett. They are not authorized for publication, distribution, or derivative use without written permission from the author. **Copyright 2025.** All rights remain fully reserved.



Media Contact

JB Google Scholar Author, Technical Content and SEO Specialist

*****@gmail.com

Source : JB Google Scholar Author, Technical Content and SEO Specialist

[See on IssueWire](#)