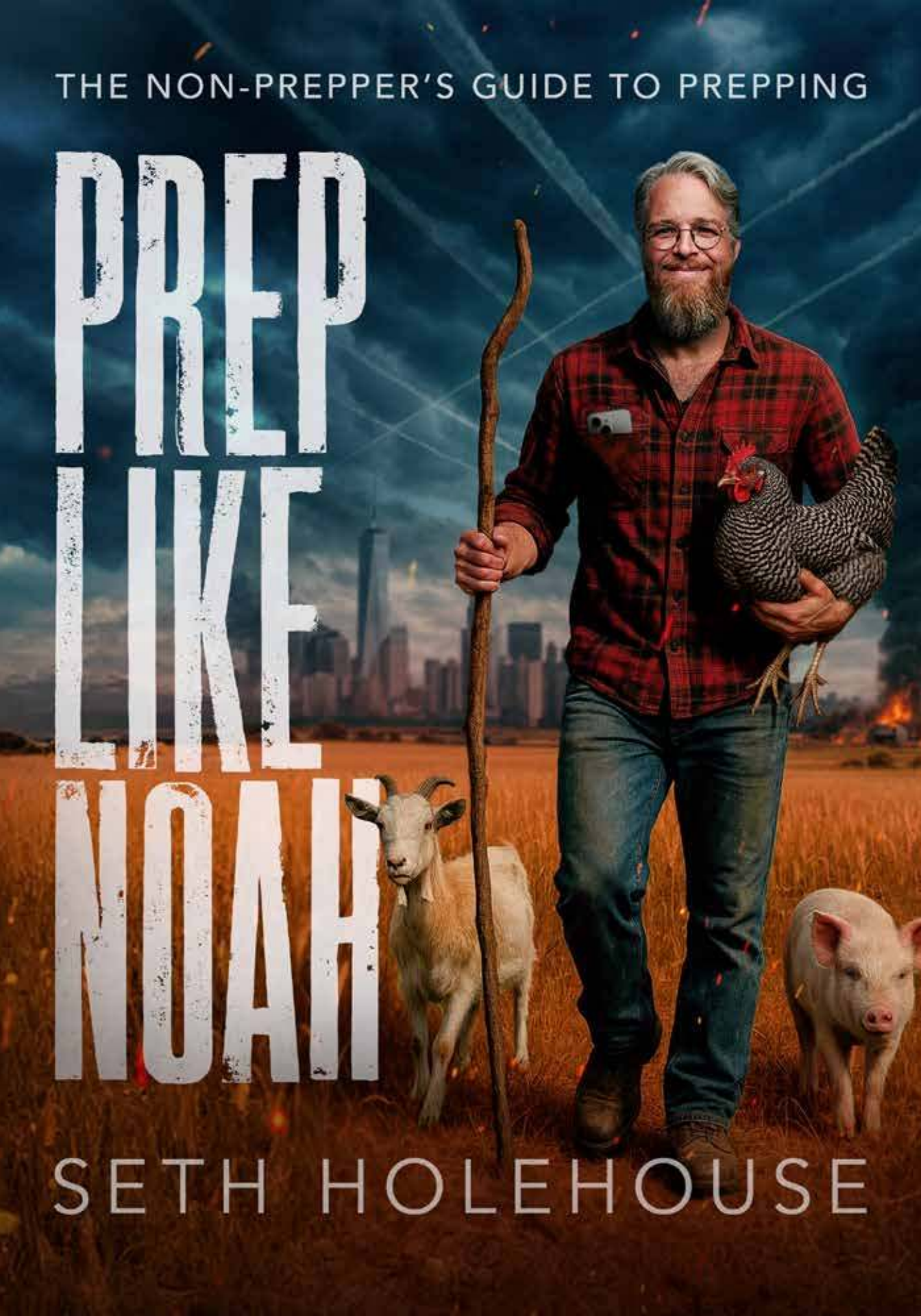
THE NON-PREPPER'S GUIDE TO PREPPING

PREP LIKE NOAH



SETH HOLEHOUSE

CHAPTER 4

FOOD



BUILDING YOUR FOOD STOCKPILE

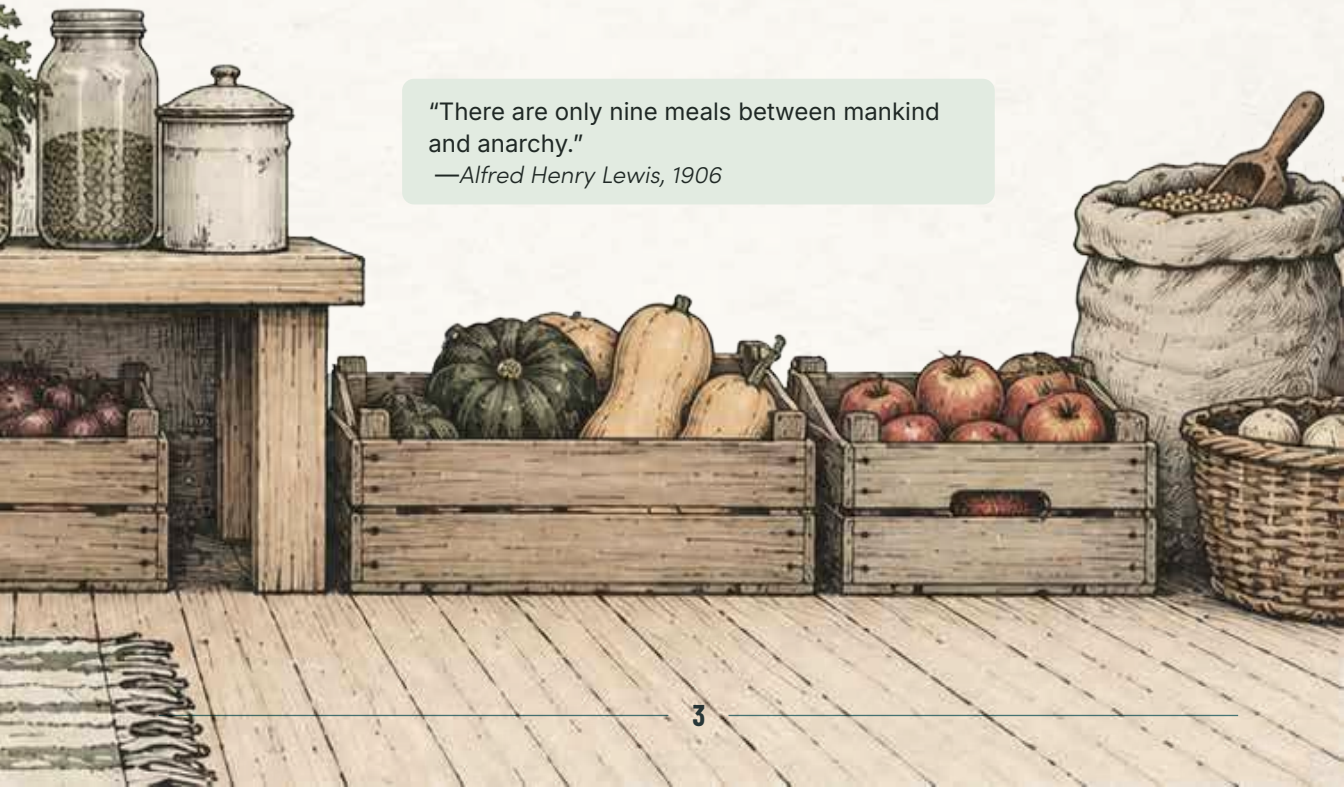
It's easy to take food for granted because, for most of us, it's always there. Fridge empty? You drive to the grocery store. One store doesn't have exactly what you want? Drive to another one. We're surrounded by so much food that the idea of not being able to get any feels almost impossible.

Until it happens.

As we discussed earlier, grocery stores depend on constant deliveries to keep their shelves stocked. It doesn't take an armageddon to interrupt that system. A major winter storm, hurricane, cyberattack, extended blackout, supply-chain breakdown, or civil unrest could do it. And once people realize food isn't coming, things can get ugly very quickly.

Imagine what your local grocery store could look like two or three days into a truly serious disaster. Shelves are nearly empty... Hundreds of scared people are looking for their next meal... Police are overwhelmed... There could be looting or violence... That's the last place I'd want my family to be.

Storing food isn't only about keeping you from starving. It's about having options. If things around you become dangerous, you don't have to go outside looking for dinner. You can lock the doors, stay home, and let the chaos happen somewhere else.



"There are only nine meals between mankind and anarchy."
—*Alfred Henry Lewis, 1906*

HOW MUCH FOOD DO YOU NEED?

At the absolute minimum, every household should have enough food to make it through two weeks without going to a store. But personally, I think that's setting the bar way too low.

My recommendation? Aim for at least a three-month food supply for your entire household.

Three months gives you a tremendous buffer. It's enough to feed your family through most natural disasters and temporary supply disruptions. It also gives you breathing room during much larger emergencies.

But don't let that number intimidate you. You don't need to buy three months of food this weekend. Start with one week. Then two. Then a month's worth. Keep building until you reach three months.

So, how much is three months?

Instead of trying to calculate pounds of rice per person, I think the easiest approach is to think in meals and calories. Three months is roughly 90 days, or 270 meals per person if you're eating three meals a day. A family of four would need roughly 1,080 meals.

Calorie requirements vary greatly by age, sex, body size, activity level, pregnancy, and other factors. So don't obsess over finding one magical number. Look at what your family actually eats now. That's the best measure. Figure out roughly how much food you go through in a normal week, then start multiplying from there.



But there's another important factor to consider: How much food you need is directly tied to how many calories you burn in a day.

Many folks spend their workweek in front of a computer, on a phone, or shuffling around an office. Imagine life without electricity for six months. Supporting your family no longer means driving to the office and bringing home take-out for dinner. It means gardening, chopping wood, hand washing clothes, walking instead of driving, repairing a roof leak yourself, and more. An office worker may only need 2,200 calories a day. If that same office worker is now spending most days doing manual labor instead, he could easily need 3,500 calories a day.

And don't forget the people who are the easiest to overlook: babies, children, elderly family members, and pets. If your baby depends on formula or your dog eats a particular food, that has to be in your preparedness calculations too.

Most importantly, **store food your family actually eats.** An emergency is a terrible time to discover that your kids would rather starve than eat the 200 pounds of lentils Dad bought because some prepper on YouTube told him to.

Also, your three-month supply shouldn't only consist of 25-year freeze-dried survival food. In fact, it shouldn't. A good food storage plan combines the foods already sitting in your pantry with canned goods, dry staples, frozen foods, preserved foods, and some truly long-term storage items.

And remember: three months isn't the end of your food preparedness plan. It's just a buffer that buys you time. Later, in Section 3, Survive & Thrive, we'll get into the things that provide real long-term food security: gardening, livestock, hunting, food preservation, and producing food yourself.

Because eventually, every stockpile runs out.



HOW TO BUILD YOUR FOOD SUPPLY

The easiest place to start is simply buying more of what you already eat.

If your family normally eats four jars of pasta sauce every month, don't keep two jars in the pantry—keep twelve. If you regularly eat canned beans, tuna, rice, oatmeal, peanut butter, pasta, soup, or canned vegetables, slowly increase the amount you keep on hand.

This creates what I like to think of as a working pantry. You're not buying food, hiding it in the basement for ten years, and hoping you remember it's there. You're constantly eating from your supply and replacing what you use.

There are also some practical benefits to this:

- You can save money by purchasing food in bulk.
- You save money by stocking up when certain foods are on sale.
- You don't need to visit the grocery store as often, saving you both time and fuel costs.

It's a hedge against inflation. My family is still eating cans of beans we bought at Costco in 2021. I'd bet those same cans of beans are 30% more expensive now than they were five years ago.



CANNED GOODS

Canned food is one of the easiest places to start. It's inexpensive, available everywhere, has a long shelf life, and requires no preparation. Stock up on vegetables, fruit, beans, soups, sauces, and especially proteins like chicken, tuna, salmon, and other canned meats.

Many commercially canned foods remain good well beyond their printed quality dates when stored properly, although you should always inspect cans for swelling, leaking, severe rust, or damage.

And most importantly: **buy at least 2-3 manual can openers**. You never want to be sitting in the dark, starving, while staring at 200 cans of food you can't open.

DRY GOODS & BULK STAPLES

Rice, pasta, oats, beans, flour, sugar, and other dry staples are some of the most inexpensive ways to build up a serious amount of calories. Many can also be purchased in bulk, allowing you to build a substantial food supply without spending a fortune.

For food that you're regularly rotating through your pantry, normal airtight containers may work just fine. But if you're putting dry staples away for many years, proper packaging becomes much more important. Mylar bags, oxygen absorbers, and food-grade buckets can dramatically extend the storage life of certain dry foods. **I'll show you exactly how to do this in the next section.**

Just remember that many dry staples require water and fuel to cook. Fifty pounds of dried beans aren't nearly as useful if you're low on water and have no way to boil them.

And don't just stock ingredients. Stock meals. Rice and beans are great, but make sure you also have salt, spices, cooking fats, bouillon, sauces, and whatever else you need to turn those basic ingredients into food your family will actually want to eat. Just because it's an apocalypse doesn't mean you have to eat like a peasant.

LESSON FROM HISTORY

The Great Depression Kitchen

During the Great Depression, families learned how to stretch everything. A chicken wasn't just one dinner. You might roast it the first night, use the leftover meat for sandwiches, boil the bones for broth, turn that broth into soup, and save the fat for cooking. Very little went to waste.

Gardens also became a major source of food. Families grew vegetables, preserved what they could, and traded with neighbors. Eggs for flour. Firewood for milk. Sewing or repair work for something else the family needed. When money was scarce, resourcefulness became its own kind of currency.

That mindset is worth bringing back. Food shouldn't just be consumed. It should be stretched, preserved, reused, and appreciated. Learn how many meals you can get from a whole chicken. Figure out ten different things you can make with a sack of potatoes. Save bones for stock. Learn to cook with leftovers instead of throwing them away.

In our household, rarely does a single calorie go to waste. Vegetable scraps go to the compost, which is basically a Golden Corral buffet for our chickens. Table scraps go to the chickens, dogs, or cats.



HIGH-CALORIE, READY-TO-EAT FOODS

Keep plenty of food that can be eaten immediately. Peanut butter, nuts, trail mix, jerky, dried fruit, crackers, energy bars, and similar foods provide a lot of calories without requiring water, electricity, or cooking.

This becomes especially important during the first hours or days of an emergency when you may have much bigger problems to deal with than cooking dinner. It's also much easier to transport if you have to bug out.



FREEZE-DRIED FOOD

Freeze-dried food is one of my favorite options for truly long-term storage. Properly packaged food can have **shelf lives measured in decades**, and they're incredibly lightweight.

The downside is price. You're paying considerably more per calorie than you would for rice, beans, pasta, or canned food. However, if you're serious about long-term food storage and have the budget, you can buy your own consumer-grade freeze-dryer. In 2021, we bought a Harvest Right freeze-dryer for around three grand. It was a big upfront cost, but it's already paid for itself through the savings of freeze-drying our own food instead of buying it pre-packaged.

But I wouldn't build your entire three-month supply around freeze-dried meals.

Use them as another layer. Think of it this way: your normal pantry handles everyday rotation, bulk staples provide inexpensive calories, canned food gives you easy meals, and freeze-dried food provides long-term insurance.



MREs

MREs (Meals, Ready-to-Eat) were originally developed for the U.S. military as a way to give soldiers a complete meal without needing access to a kitchen. Everything you need comes in a sealed package, and many include a flameless heater. Who says you can't have some hot lasagna in a ditch in Afghanistan?

They're designed around convenience and durability, not necessarily cost or compactness. Compared with rice or beans, MREs are pretty expensive per calorie. And compared with freeze-dried backpacking food, they're heavy and bulky. Their shelf life also depends heavily on temperature. The hotter they're stored, the faster their quality deteriorates.

For those reasons, I wouldn't build my entire food stockpile around MREs. Where they really shine is when cooking isn't practical. Keep some around for evacuations, vehicle kits, Bug Out Bags, or the first chaotic days of an emergency when you simply want to tear open a package and eat.

PRO TIP

The Rule of Threes in Food Storage

Don't build your entire food supply around one type of food. **Think in layers.** Different foods make sense for different situations.

Short-Term:
3 Days to 2 Weeks

Stock foods you can eat right away with very little prep, like canned food, peanut butter, tuna, jerky, granola bars, and ready-to-eat meals. If the power just went out and everything is chaos, you probably don't want to start soaking beans.

Mid-Term:
2 Weeks to 3 Months

This is where your normal pantry and bulk staples come in: rice, beans, pasta, oats, flour, canned goods, and other foods your family already eats. They're inexpensive and easy to store, but just remember that many require water and cooking fuel.

Long-Term:
3 Months and Beyond

Freeze-dried foods, properly packaged grains and dry goods, canned foods, and other food with a long shelf-life. Some can remain good for decades when packaged and stored properly.

The goal is to have all three. Eat and rotate through your everyday foods while keeping your long-term supplies tucked away for when you really need them.

HOW TO STORE FOOD

Buying $2,000 worth of emergency food doesn't accomplish much if mice eat half of it and the other half spoils in your 110-degree garage. Food storage matters a lot.

Cool, Dry & Dark

Heat, moisture, oxygen, light, and pests are the enemies of stored food. Generally speaking, food lasts much longer when it's kept somewhere cool, dry, dark, and relatively temperature-stable.

A basement, pantry, or interior storage room can work beautifully. A shed that swings between freezing winters and blazing summers generally isn't ideal. If you keep food in your car trunk (which I recommend), make sure you rotate it often. Unless you live in Alaska.





Protect It from Rodents & Insects

Mice can turn an impressive food stockpile into an impressive pile of mouse poo.

Use sturdy sealed containers where appropriate, keep the storage area clean, and periodically inspect everything for evidence of insects or rodents. Don't assume that because you packed something away five years ago it's still sitting there untouched.

I keep any food that mice could chew into, such as Mylar bags, in large plastic storage totes with tight-fitting lids.

Rotate What You Store

Remember **FIFO: First In, First Out.**

Put newer food toward the back and eat the older food first. This is another reason I love the working-pantry approach. Your emergency food doesn't sit around gathering dust. **You eat what you store and store what you eat.** This matters less with long-term food that has a 20+ year shelf life, such as freeze-dried food or bulk grains stored in sealed 5-gallon buckets.



Keep an Inventory

Once your stockpile becomes substantial, it's surprisingly easy to forget what you have. Keep a simple inventory showing the food, quantity, and approximate storage or expiration dates.

This also helps expose any weaknesses. You might discover that you've somehow accumulated six months of rice but only two weeks of protein.

Don't Forget Water and Fuel

This one is huge.

When you're planning meals, ask yourself: **How much water does this require to cook? How will I cook it if the power is out?**

Your food, water, and cooking plans need to work together. You need to have several ways to cook without grid power and enough fuel to match your supplies.



HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR FOOD

Food storage gets even more potent when you stop relying on food somebody else packaged for you.

Learning to preserve food lets you take advantage of your garden, livestock, hunting, local farms, bulk purchases, and seasonal sales.



Canning

Canning is one of the most useful food-preservation skills you can learn. Fruits, jams, pickles, vegetables, meat, soups, chili, stocks, and entire meals can be preserved in jars and stored right on your shelf.

There are two major methods, **water-bath canning and pressure canning**, and they're not interchangeable. Low-acid foods such as meat and most vegetables require pressure canning to protect against it becoming toxic. This is one area where you don't want to skip any steps or improvise.

Once you learn how to do it safely, though, canning is an incredible preparedness skill.

Dehydrating

Dehydrating removes the moisture that microorganisms need to grow. Fruits, vegetables, herbs, and meats can all be dehydrated, dramatically reducing their weight and increasing their shelf life.

It's inexpensive, relatively easy to learn, and particularly useful if you're producing your own food. For storing dehydrated food, I'd recommend vacuum sealing.

PRO TIP

Five Cheap Calorie Staples

If you're prepping on a budget, start with cheap foods that pack a lot of calories and store well. You can put away a surprising amount of food without spending a fortune.

Rice: Cheap, easy to find, and around 1,600 calories per pound. White rice can last for decades when properly stored in Mylar bags or food-grade buckets with oxygen absorbers.

Beans: Another dirt-cheap staple that provides calories, protein, and fiber. Properly stored dried beans can last for decades, although they may take longer to cook as they age.

Oats: Cheap, filling, and versatile. Eat them as oatmeal, bake with them, grind them into flour, or add them to other meals.

Peanut Butter: Packed with calories, fat, and protein, and requires absolutely no cooking. The downside is its shorter shelf life, so this is something you'll want to rotate.

Lard: Fat is easy to overlook when you start storing food, but it's incredibly calorie-dense. Fat has more than double the calories per gram of carbs or protein. Lard is useful for frying, baking, and adding much-needed calories to otherwise basic meals.

Rice, beans, oats, peanut butter, and lard give you a cheap foundation with a ton of calories. Then start adding canned meat and vegetables, spices, sauces, and other foods that provide better nutrition and turn the basic ingredients into proper meals.

Vacuum Sealing

Vacuum sealing removes much of the air surrounding food and can help extend the quality of many foods, particularly when combined with refrigeration or freezing.

It's also fantastic for organizing and portioning supplies. Just don't assume vacuum sealing automatically makes something shelf-stable. **Removing the air doesn't magically make every food safe to store at room temperature.**



Freeze Drying

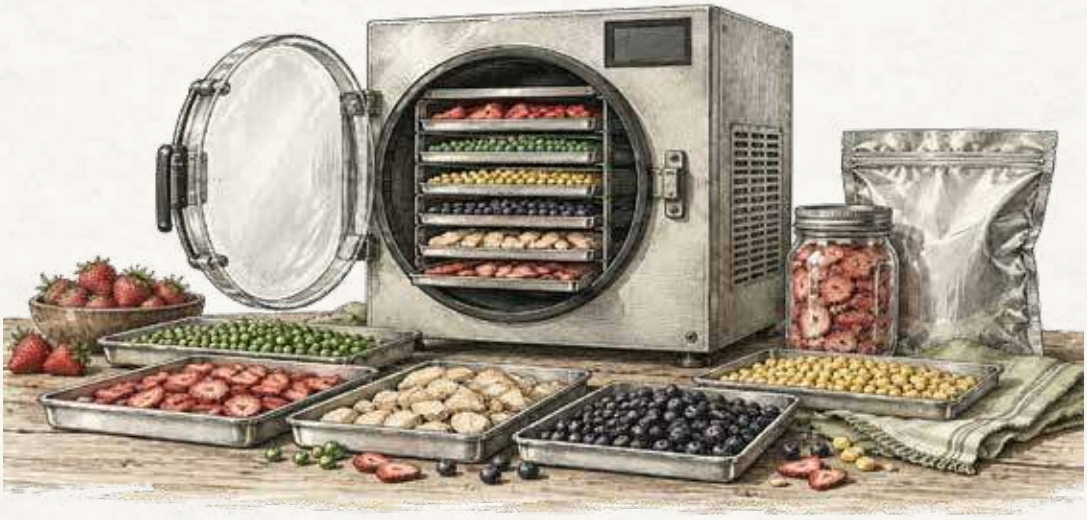
Freeze drying takes food preservation to another level. The process freezes food and removes most of its moisture under vacuum, producing food that is extremely lightweight and **can last for years when packaged correctly.**

You can freeze-dry fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, leftovers, and even entire homemade meals. At one point, we had around 50 chickens for our then-family of three. **I had eggs coming out of my ears.** I was able to freeze-dry around 100 eggs at a time, and I probably have a few thousand eggs stored up that require no refrigeration. Properly packaged and stored, **freeze-dried eggs can potentially last for decades.**

And this is where owning your own freeze-dryer starts to make a lot of sense. Even accounting for chicken feed, those eggs probably only cost me a few hundred dollars to produce. Buying the equivalent amount of commercially packaged long-term storage eggs could easily cost **a couple thousand dollars.**

Home freeze-dryers aren't cheap. We paid around $3,000 for ours. But when you start doing the math, **that expensive machine suddenly doesn't seem quite so expensive.** And that's just the eggs. We've freeze-dried everything from leftovers to full meals. Over time, the savings really start to add up.

For someone serious about long-term preparedness, especially if you produce your own food, **a freeze-dryer can be an incredible tool.** Instead of buying somebody else's expensive freeze-dried meals, you can put away your own food, cooked exactly the way your family likes it.



One Last Thing

Remember: your food stockpile is buying you time. Three months of food means three months where you don't have to depend on a grocery store, a government food line, or somebody showing up to rescue you. But stored food isn't infinite. Eventually, even the biggest pantry will run empty.

That's why food storage is only the first layer. Later in Survive & Thrive, we'll move beyond simply storing food to learning how to **produce it** through gardening, livestock, hunting, and other skills to keep your family fed long after the cans and buckets start running empty.

