



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

Office of Communication

1300 E Avenue □ Fort Lee, VA 23801-1800

Tel: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8524 DSN: 687-8000, Ext. 4-8524

FAX: (804) 734-8248 DSN: 687-8248

[www.commissaries.com](http://www.commissaries.com)

---

**Release Number:** 10-10  
**Date:** January 19, 2010  
**Contact:** Kevin Robinson, public affairs specialist  
**Tel.:** (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8773  
**E-mail:** [kevin.robinson@deca.mil](mailto:kevin.robinson@deca.mil)

## More customers, higher savings percentage point to stronger benefit

*By Kevin L. Robinson,  
DeCA public affairs specialist*

**FORT LEE, Va.** – Even a challenging economy couldn't diminish the strength of the commissary benefit as more customers decided to take advantage of their annual savings.

In fiscal 2009, customers conducted 94.7 million transactions at commissaries, up 1.81 million from fiscal 2008. Increased visits and the percentage of savings rising from 31.1 to 31.7 percent in September 2009 are both indications of the strength of the benefit, said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr.

“A combination of more customers in our stores and a higher savings percentage means the commissary benefit is even stronger,” Sakowitz said. “We want those customers who aren't using their benefit to know just what they're missing in savings.”

Missing the savings his commissary benefit provides was enough to convince Navy Reserve Chief Petty Officer Rene Sotolongo, a mobilized reservist who is stationed at Naval Base San Diego, to put the uniform back on.

“When I got off of full active duty there was a point where I had no benefits at all, so I was kind of forced to shop out in town,” he said. “Shortly thereafter, my wife started complaining because we saw the food bills increasing exponentially, and that was one of my driving factors to go back to the Navy so that I could get my commissary privileges back. ... We saw our food bills drop about \$150 a month – and that's a lot of money.”

Month by month, consumer spending for groceries is affected by the ebb and flow of

product prices. What remains steady for commissary customers is the realization that despite a tough economy their benefit still provides 30 percent or more in savings, said Randy Chandler, DeCA's then director of sales. "The proportion of savings is what counts, and our customers continue to get more from their benefit from the dollars they spend."

Customer savings figures are based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture survey that measures household grocery store purchases. For example, the commissary dollar savings for a family of four depends on how much customers spend for food and the average percentage of savings they get when they shop.

Each month, the USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion calculates how much Americans spend for grocery, meat and produce items. With the changing of the fiscal clock, DeCA's sales directorate examines the USDA's figures to determine annual monetary savings amounts for its customers in various family-sized units – a single military member, a couple, a family of three or four – based on the commissary's savings of more than 30 percent:

- **A family of four saves nearly \$3,300** (\$3,283) annually based on spending an average of about \$607 for what would cost about \$881 per month in a commercial supermarket. Previous annual savings for fiscal 2008 were about \$3,280.
- **A family of three saves more than \$2,500** (\$2,569) annually based on spending an average of about \$475 for what would cost about \$689 per month. Annual savings in 2008 were about \$2,564.
- **A couple saves more than \$2,000** (\$2,083) annually based on spending an average of about \$385 for what would cost about \$559 per month. Annual savings in 2008 were about \$2,075.
- **A single service member saves more than \$1,100** (\$1,136) annually based on spending an average of about \$210 for what would cost about \$305 per month. Annual savings in 2008 were about \$1,131.

Commissary savings percentages are calculated based on an annual price comparison study. Procedures differ somewhat depending on geographic location. In the continental United States, DeCA captures prices through Nielsen's database of commissary and industry front end sales volume on more than 30,000 grocery items with a Universal Product Code. Pricing comparisons for meat and produce department items in the continental United States are accomplished through in-store audits at 30 randomly selected commissaries to compare them with commercial retail stores within commuting distance.

For stores located in Alaska, Hawaii, the Far East, Europe, Guam and Puerto Rico, DeCA

conducts additional in-store audits, using a broad sample of grocery, meat and produce items. Savings percentages compare commissary prices, which include DeCA's 5-percent surcharge, to commercial prices with any applicable sales taxes included.

“At the end of the day we look at how many authorized customers shop and the savings we deliver to them,” Sakowitz said. “Both of these numbers tell us that the commissary continues to be worth the trip for our patrons.”

**- DeCA-**

**About DeCA:** *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,300 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*