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

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Contact:	Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins, DeCA dietitian
Tel.:	(804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8404
E-mail:	karen.hawkins@deca.mil

Home cooking takes the edge off of a tough economy

By Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins,
DeCA dietitian

FORT LEE, Va. – Cooking dinner at home tonight? You're not alone as more Americans are heading to the kitchen to cook these days, according to a new survey by the American Institute for Cancer Research. Forty percent of Americans say they are cooking at home more often due to the current economy. According to the same survey, half of the respondents reported they are eating less fast food now in relation to making better health choices. So, even with the current economic situation, we are looking for ways to make healthy choices while preparing meals on a budget.

Also, it appears that today's economy has motivated many to eat more vegetables and fruits, eat less red meat and exercise more, the survey said. Your commissary is here to help you do all of this, and provide you with savings of 30 percent or more.

As a dietitian, I enjoy sharing ideas about how to eat healthy and manage money at the same time. I often plan my meals around whole grains such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, quinoa, and beans and vegetables with meat on the side to complement the meal. You can create a meal in 30 minutes or less with just a few food items and a little creativity. You can also visit Kay's Kitchen on www.commissaries.com for more ideas and tasty meal recipes.

Tips for healthy meals at home

Keep the basics in your pantry. This includes foods such as canned beans, dry beans, brown rice, whole-grain pasta, spaghetti sauce, canned fish, whole-grain crackers and peanut

butter. Read labels and try to select foods that provide 5 percent daily value, and whenever possible, less than that for sodium per serving. Or, rinse canned beans and vegetables in water to get rid of some of the salt before cooking.

Plan a weekly menu after looking at what's on sale at your local commissary. You might also want to take advantage of the coupons offered on www.commissaries.com. Choose the "Links" tab and "Coupons" from the drop-down box. Print them out and take them with you. Stock up on canned foods and frozen foods – on sale this month – as space at home and your budget allows.

Grow herbs and vegetables – especially lettuce and tomatoes – in containers or a garden. This can be a rewarding project that helps you teach children about food and where it comes from. You and your family will enjoy fresh vegetables all summer long.

Buy whole chicken instead of a pre-cut chicken, and less expensive cuts of meat to help save money. Try using a crockpot or slow cooker to cook one-pot meals to save on time. Cuts of beef including shoulder, round and rump are well-suited for slow cooking and using a crock pot is a great way to tenderize them.

For more information about making healthy choices, visit Ask the Dietitian on http://www.commissaries.com and post your questions on the DeCA Dietitian Forum. Be sure to look for other useful information in the Dietitian's Voice archive. Sign up with the DeCA Dietitian on www.twitter.com and get messages sent to your cell phone today. For delicious recipes, check out Kay's Kitchen. And to enjoy all your commissary has to offer, sign up for the *Commissary Connection*.

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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.*