

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS  
Washington, D. C.

DIFFERENCES IN LIVING COSTS IN 5 NORTHERN AND 5 SOUTHERN CITIES.

The cost of living in 5 small Southern cities surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics at the request of the Wage and Hour Division averages 3.1 percent lower than in 5 Northern cities of the same size. Lower housing and fuel costs in the 5 Southern cities are partially offset by higher prices for clothing, furniture, furnishings and equipment, and miscellaneous items, while food prices are virtually the same. This difference in average cost is very small particularly when it is considered in the light of the wider differences between costs within the same region. The lowest as well as the highest cost in the 10 cities surveyed was found among the Northern group.

These calculations are derived from an investigation of retail prices and rents conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as of December 15, 1938, in 10 cities of 10,000 to 20,000 population. The cities covered are:

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Chillicothe, Ohio   | Hattiesburg, Miss. |
| Dover, N. H.        | Sherman, Texas     |
| Hanover, Pa.        | Statesville, N. C. |
| Holland, Mich.      | Sumter, S. C.      |
| Little Falls, N. Y. | Thomasville, N. C. |

This survey confirms a study made by the Works Progress Administration, Division of Social Research, in March 1935 in cities of 25,000 and more which also showed larger differences between costs in different cities of the same region than between average cost in different regions.

Numerous studies have been made comparing wages, incomes and actual levels of living prevailing in the North and South. The present survey was designed to show differences in the cost of living in these 5 Northern and 5 Southern cities, for comparable levels of living. The figure just quoted represents the average cost in these cities of the goods and services purchased by Northern and Southern wage earners. Full allowance has been made for differences in prices. In addition, allowance has been made for the apparent influence of climate upon fuel requirements and type of housing construction. With the exception of these items, the comparison has been made of the price of identical commodities.

Food is the largest item in the wage-earner budget. It constitutes from one-third to two-fifths of the total expenditures, being relatively more important at lower income levels than at higher ones. The present investigation indicates that there is no significant difference in average food costs as between the two regions. This conclusion is based upon a consideration of the prices and the quantities of food customarily purchased

by the families of employed wage earners in both regions combined.

The small average difference in living costs of 3.1 percent results largely from the lower cost of housing and fuel in the 5 Southern cities as compared to the 5 Northern. On the average, rents in the 5 Southern cities are 7.6 percent lower than those in the North for houses of the same age with the same number of rooms and with similar facilities. Fuel costs are 34.2 percent lower in the 5 Southern cities. Rent constitutes approximately 17 percent of the wage-earner's family expenditures in cities of this size, and expenditures for fuel, light and refrigeration combined about 8 percent.

Rents were secured for houses of 4, 5, and 6 rooms having as a minimum, running water, inside flush toilets, and electricity for lighting. Rents for company houses were not included in the survey of cities in either region because of the provision of the Fair Labor Standards Act that the wages required by the Act may include "the reasonable cost, as determined by the Administrator, to the employer of furnishing such employee with board, lodging or other facilities." No attempt was made to secure rents for houses of the same type of construction in the Northern and Southern cities as differences in construction are naturally associated with the differences in climate of the two areas. For the same reason, houses with gas room heaters in the

Southern cities were treated as providing the same level of living as houses with furnaces in the Northern cities.

The saving in living costs in the Southern cities represented by the average difference in fuel cost which arises primarily because of climatic conditions, applies to that 8 percent of the total family expenditures which goes for these items. In the present investigation the fuels priced were those customarily used in each region. Bituminous coal, anthracite and fuel oil are the fuels most commonly used for heating by Northern wage earners; bituminous coal, wood, and gas by Southern wage earners. Furthermore, the quantity of the fuel assigned to the budget that was calculated for each region was based on the actual heat content (measured in B.T.U.'s) of the fuels that were customarily purchased by wage-earner families in small Northern and Southern cities. The Consumer Purchases Study <sup>1/</sup> showed that approximately half as much heat is used by Southern wage earners as by those in the North. On the other hand, a larger quantity of ice is characteristically used in the South than in the North, and therefore a larger quantity was allowed for the South in the budgets used.

---

<sup>1/</sup> A study of actual consumer purchases made in 1935-36 in small Northern and small Southern cities by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Home Economics in cooperation with the National Resources Committee, the Central Statistical Board and the Works Progress Administration, provided information on the kinds and quantities of goods customarily purchased by wage earners in each region.



Other items of expenditure are somewhat higher in the Southern cities than in the Northern cities included in the survey. On the whole, the average differences in the cost of clothing, furniture, furnishings and equipment and miscellaneous items are small; they are respectively 2.0 percent, 3.8 percent and 3.0 percent higher in the 5 Southern cities.

In addition to computing the cost of the average purchases of wage earners, North and South, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has also calculated the cost in these 10 cities of a budget based on the quantities of goods actually consumed by employed wage earners in the South; and another based on the quantities actually consumed by employed wage earners in the North. This procedure makes it possible to compute the differences between the two groups of cities in terms of the consumption pattern of each region separately.

In the case of food, especially, it is important in comparing living costs between regions not to assume the same pattern of consumption over a broad area. Wage-earner families in the cities in each region appear to have adapted their purchases of food to include items that are cheaper in the cities in that particular region. Thus, it would cost 3.9 percent more in the 5 Southern cities than in the 5 Northern cities to buy the types of food that constitute an average wage-earner diet in the North. Conversely, it would cost 3.2 percent less in the

Southern cities than in the Northern cities to buy the types of food that constitute an average wage-earner diet in the South. Essentially, therefore, there is no general difference in the cost of food as between the two regions.

The cost of the goods consumed by an average family of an employed wage earner in the North is 1 percent less in the 5 Southern cities surveyed than in the Northern cities surveyed. In dollars, the cost is \$1,387 in the Northern cities and \$1,374 in the Southern cities. Wage-earner families in the 5 Southern cities on the average would have to spend \$13 less than wage earners in the 5 Northern cities to secure the same kind of living.

On the other hand, the cost of goods consumed by an average family of an employed wage earner in the South is 5.3 percent less in the 5 Southern cities than in the 5 Northern cities. Incomes, and therefore family expenditures, are lower among wage earners in the South than in the North. The average purchases of a Southern worker's family cost \$1,075 in the 5 small Southern cities covered in the present survey, and \$1,136 in the 5 small Northern cities.

TABLE A. INDEXES OF LIVING COSTS IN 10 CITIES WITH POPULATION FROM 10,000 TO 20,000 INHABITANTS

December 15, 1938

Average for 10 cities - 100

Using as weights average quantities of goods purchased annually by wage earners in small northern and southern cities. 1/

| REGION AND CITY                      | TOTAL | FOOD <u>2/</u> | CLOTH-<br>ING | HOUSING | FUEL,<br>LIGHT &<br>REFRIG-<br>ERATION | FURNITURE<br>&<br>HOUSEHOLD<br>EQUIPMENT | MIS-<br>CEL-<br>LANE-<br>OUS |
|--------------------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------|---------|--|--|------------------------------|
| <u>NORTH</u>                         |       |                |               |         |  |  |                              |
| Chillicothe                          | 103.5 | 99.3           | 105.4         | 119.8   | 96.8                                   | 102.0                                    | 100.9                        |
| Dover                                | 109.2 | 109.9          | 93.1          | 121.0   | 143.3                                  | 98.7                                     | 99.8                         |
| Hanover                              | 94.6  | 96.4           | 89.5          | 86.2    | 112.2                                  | 97.8                                     | 93.7                         |
| Holland                              | 96.7  | 94.5           | 105.0         | 82.6    | 119.8                                  | 92.5                                     | 98.3                         |
| Little Falls                         | 103.9 | 99.3           | 102.0         | 110.1   | 130.7                                  | 99.5                                     | 99.6                         |
| Average for the 5<br>Northern cities | 101.6 | 99.9           | 99.0          | 103.9   | 120.6                                  | 98.1                                     | 98.5                         |
| <u>SOUTH</u>                         |       |                |               |         |  |  |                              |
| Hattiesburg                          | 97.9  | 99.3           | 102.9         | 83.7    | 78.5                                   | 107.9                                    | 106.2                        |
| Sherman                              | 95.0  | 95.6           | 103.5         | 79.2    | 82.0                                   | 99.9                                     | 103.0                        |
| Statesville                          | 102.0 | 102.2          | 106.4         | 102.1   | 88.7                                   | 104.0                                    | 103.6                        |
| Sumter                               | 99.8  | 100.1          | 92.3          | 121.3   | 76.8                                   | 95.3                                     | 97.1                         |
| Thomasville                          | 97.2  | 103.3          | 100.1         | 93.7    | 70.9                                   | 101.8                                    | 97.6                         |
| Average for the 5<br>Southern cities | 98.4  | 100.1          | 101.0         | 96.0    | 79.4                                   | 101.8                                    | 101.5                        |

1/ Based on data from the Study of Consumer Purchases. Average purchases of wage earners in New England and East North Central small cities from the survey made by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; average purchases of wage earners in the Southeastern small cities supplied by the U. S. Bureau of Home Economics

2/ Prices apply to February 14, 1939.



(Continued)

INDEXES OF LIVING COSTS IN 10 CITIES WITH POPULATION FROM  
10,000 TO 20,000 INHABITANTS

December 15, 1938

Average for the 10 Cities - 100

B. Using as weights quantities customarily consumed  
by wage earners in small northern cities 1/

| REGION AND CITY                      | TOTAL | FOOD <u>2/</u> | CLOTH-<br>ING | HOUSING | FUEL,<br>LIGHT &<br>REFRIG-<br>ERATION | FURNITURE<br>& FURNISHINGS<br>HOUSEHOLD<br>EQUIPMENT | MIS-<br>CEL-<br>LANE-<br>OUS |
|--------------------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------|---------|--|--|------------------------------|
| <u>NORTH</u>                         |       |                |               |         |  |  |                              |
| Chillicothe                          | 103.1 | 99.0           | 105.1         | 119.2   | 96.5                                   | 101.7  | 100.2                        |
| Dover                                | 107.9 | 107.3          | 93.0          | 120.7   | 142.3                                  | 97.0   | 99.7                         |
| Hanover                              | 93.9  | 95.2           | 88.9          | 86.7    | 111.8                                  | 95.8   | 93.3                         |
| Holland                              | 95.2  | 92.7           | 105.9         | 80.3    | 117.2                                  | 92.9   | 97.6                         |
| Little Falls                         | 102.4 | 96.4           | 101.6         | 109.2   | 129.6                                  | 98.6   | 99.8                         |
| Average for the 5<br>Northern cities | 100.5 | 98.1           | 98.9          | 103.2   | 119.5                                  | 97.2   | 98.1                         |
| <u>SOUTH</u>                         |       |                |               |         |  |  |                              |
| Hattiesburg                          | 98.8  | 100.6          | 103.0         | 83.4    | 79.3                                   | 106.8  | 107.1                        |
| Sherman                              | 95.8  | 96.0           | 104.0         | 80.5    | 83.2                                   | 101.7  | 103.4                        |
| Statesville                          | 103.3 | 104.2          | 106.7         | 102.6   | 91.2                                   | 105.2  | 104.1                        |
| Sumter                               | 101.3 | 102.6          | 92.2          | 122.2   | 76.8                                   | 98.1   | 97.6                         |
| Thomasville                          | 98.4  | 106.0          | 99.8          | 94.8    | 71.7                                   | 102.1  | 97.1                         |
| Average for the 5<br>Southern cities | 99.5  | 101.9          | 101.1         | 96.7    | 80.4                                   | 102.8  | 101.9                        |

1/ As shown by the Study of Consumer Purchases made by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in small cities in New England and the East North Central Region. Data represent the average purchases of families of white wage earners, including husband and wife both native born, not having been on relief at any time during the year covered by the survey.

2/ Prices apply to February 14, 1939.



INDEXES OF LIVING COSTS IN 10 CITIES WITH POPULATION FROM  
10,000 TO 20,000 INHABITANTS

December 15, 1938

Average for the 10 Cities - 100

C. Using as weights quantities customarily consumed  
by wage earners in small southern cities <sup>1/</sup>

| REGION AND CITY                      | : TOTAL : | : FOOD <sup>2/</sup> : | : CLOTH-<br>: ing : | : HOUSING : | : FUEL,<br>: LIGHT &<br>: REFRIG-<br>: ERATION : | : FURNITURE<br>: FURNISHINGS<br>: HOUSEHOLD<br>: EQUIPMENT : | : MIS-<br>: CEL-<br>: LANE-<br>: OUS : |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--|--|--|
| <u>NORTH</u>                         |           |                        |                     |             |  |  |  |
| Chillicothe                          | 104.0     | 99.6                   | 105.7               | 120.4       | 97.1   | 102.3  | 101.7                                  |
| Dover                                | 110.6     | 112.5                  | 93.2                | 121.3       | 144.3  | 100.4  | 99.9                                   |
| Hanover                              | 95.4      | 97.7                   | 90.1                | 85.8        | 112.7  | 99.8   | 94.0                                   |
| Holland                              | 98.3      | 96.3                   | 104.1               | 85.0        | 122.4  | 92.1   | 99.1                                   |
| Little Falls                         | 105.4     | 102.2                  | 102.5               | 111.0       | 131.8  | 100.4  | 99.4                                   |
| Average for the 5<br>Northern cities | 102.7     | 101.7                  | 99.1                | 104.7       | 121.7  | 99.0   | 98.8                                   |
| <u>SOUTH</u>                         |           |                        |                     |             |  |  |  |
| Hattiesburg                          | 97.1      | 98.0                   | 102.9               | 84.0        | 77.8   | 109.1  | 105.3                                  |
| Sherman                              | 94.2      | 96.2                   | 103.0               | 77.9        | 80.9   | 98.1   | 102.6                                  |
| Statesville                          | 100.8     | 100.3                  | 106.1               | 101.6       | 86.2   | 102.7  | 103.1                                  |
| Sumter                               | 98.3      | 97.7                   | 92.4                | 120.4       | 76.9   | 92.6   | 96.7                                   |
| Thomasville                          | 96.0      | 100.6                  | 100.4               | 92.7        | 70.2   | 101.6  | 98.1                                   |
| Average for the 5<br>Southern cities | 97.3      | 98.4                   | 101.0               | 95.3        | 78.4   | 100.8  | 101.2                                  |

<sup>1/</sup> As shown by the Study of Consumer Purchases in the Southeast. Data applying to families of white and negro wage earners including husband and wife both native born, not having been on relief at any time during the year were supplied by the U.S. Bureau of Home Economics. Averages representing purchases of white and negro families were combined by weights representing the proportion of white and negro families in cities of this size in the Southeastern and South Central Regions and in Texas, as shown by the Census.

<sup>2/</sup> Prices apply to February 14, 1939.

ESTIMATED COST OF LIVING IN 10 CITIES WITH POPULATION FROM  
10,000 TO 20,000 INHABITANTS

December 15, 1938

B. Cost of the goods customarily purchased annually by the families  
of wage earners in small Northern cities <sup>1/</sup>

| REGION AND CITY                      | TOTAL  | FOOD <sup>2/</sup> | CLOTH-<br>ING | HOUSING | FUEL,<br>LIGHT &<br>REFRIG-<br>ERATION | FURNITURE<br>&<br>HOUSEHOLD<br>EQUIPMENT | MIS-<br>CEL-<br>LANE-<br>OUS |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------------------|---------------|---------|--|--|------------------------------|
| <u>NORTH</u>                         |        |                    |               |         |  |  |                              |
| Chillicothe                          | \$1423 | \$460              | \$133         | \$261   | \$ 94                                  | \$ 59                                    | \$416                        |
| Dover                                | 1489   | 498                | 118           | 264     | 139                                    | 56                                       | 414                          |
| Hanover                              | 1296   | 442                | 112           | 190     | 110                                    | 55                                       | 387                          |
| Holland                              | 1314   | 431                | 134           | 176     | 115                                    | 53                                       | 405                          |
| Little Falls                         | 1413   | 448                | 128           | 239     | 127                                    | 57                                       | 414                          |
| Average for the 5<br>Northern cities | 1387   | 456                | 125           | 226     | 117                                    | 56                                       | 407                          |
| <u>SOUTH</u>                         |        |                    |               |         |  |  |                              |
| Hattiesburg                          | 1364   | 467                | 130           | 183     | 78                                     | 62                                       | 444                          |
| Sherman                              | 1323   | 446                | 131           | 176     | 82                                     | 59                                       | 429                          |
| Statesville                          | 1426   | 484                | 135           | 225     | 89                                     | 61                                       | 432                          |
| Sumter                               | 1398   | 477                | 117           | 268     | 75                                     | 56                                       | 405                          |
| Thomasville                          | 1358   | 492                | 126           | 208     | 70                                     | 59                                       | 403                          |
| Average for the 5<br>Southern cities | 1374   | 473                | 128           | 212     | 79                                     | 59                                       | 423                          |
| Average for the 10<br>small cities   | 1380   | 464                | 126           | 219     | 98                                     | 58                                       | 415                          |

<sup>1/</sup> As shown by the Study of Consumer Purchases for the New England and East Central Regions data apply to the families of white wage earners, including husband and wife both native born, not having been on relief at any time during the year, covered by the survey. The small cities in which data on annual purchases were secured are: Greenfield, Mass.; Westbrook, Maine; Wallingford, Conn.; Willimantic, Conn.; Beaver Falls, Pa.; Connellsville, Pa.; Logansport, Ind.; Mattoon, Ill.; and Peru, Ind.

<sup>2/</sup> Prices apply to February 14, 1939.

ESTIMATED COST OF LIVING IN 10 CITIES WITH POPULATION  
FROM 10,000 to 20,000 INHABITANTS

December 15, 1938

C. Cost of the goods customarily purchased annually by families of wage earners in small Southern cities 1/

| REGION<br>AND<br>CITY                | TOTAL  | FOOD<br><u>2/</u> | CLOTH-<br>ING | HOUSING | FUEL<br>LIGHT &<br>REFRIG-<br>ERATION | FURNITURE<br>FURNISHINGS<br>HOUSEHOLD<br>EQUIPMENT | MISCEL-<br>LANEOUS |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-------------------|---------------|---------|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| <u>NORTH</u>                         |        |                   |               |         |                                       |  |                    |
| Chillicothe                          | \$1149 | \$ 354            | \$ 120        | \$ 208  | \$ 97                                 | \$ 53  | \$ 317             |
| Dover                                | 1223   | 400               | 106           | 210     | 144                                   | 52   | 311                |
| Granover                             | 1055   | 348               | 103           | 148     | 112                                   | 51   | 293                |
| Holland                              | 1087   | 343               | 119           | 147     | 122                                   | 47   | 309                |
| Little Falls                         | 1165   | 363               | 117           | 192     | 131                                   | 52   | 310                |
| Average for the 5<br>Northern cities | 1136   | 362               | 113           | 181     | 121                                   | 51   | 308                |
| <u>SOUTH</u>                         |        |                   |               |         |                                       |  |                    |
| Hattiesburg                          | 1073   | 349               | 117           | 146     | 77                                    | 56   | 328                |
| Sherman                              | 1041   | 339               | 117           | 135     | 80                                    | 51   | 319                |
| Statesville                          | 1114   | 357               | 121           | 176     | 86                                    | 53   | 321                |
| Sumter                               | 1087   | 348               | 105           | 208     | 77                                    | 48   | 301                |
| Thomasville                          | 1061   | 358               | 114           | 161     | 70                                    | 52   |                    |
| Average for the 5<br>Southern cities | 1075   | 350               | 115           | 165     | 78                                    | 52   | 315                |
| Average for the 10<br>small cities   | 1106   | 356               | 114           | 173     | 100                                   | 52   | 311                |

1/ As shown by the Study of Consumer Purchases in the Southeast, Data applying to families of white and negro wage earners, including husband and wife both native-born not having been on relief at any time during the year were supplied by the U.S. Bureau of Home Economics. Averages representing purchases of white and Negro families were combined by weights representing the proportion of white and Negro families in cities of this size in the Southeastern and South Central Regions and in Texas, as shown by the Census. The small cities in which data on annual purchases were secured are Albany, Ga.; Gastonia, N.C.; Griffin, Ga.; and Sumter, N.C.

2/ Prices apply to February 14, 1939.