

STORE-BRAND TASTE-OFF

Consumer Reports October 2012

Taste-test results

In blind tests, our trained tasters evaluated 19 pairs of staple foods. National brands and store brands tied 10 times; national brands won eight times; store brands, once. Costs are based on the average prices our shoppers paid.

BY THE NUMBERS

23.6

Percentage of supermarket products that are store brands, according to the Private Label Manufacturers Association.

Based off the tests, store brands were often at least as good as national Brands. And cost less! \$

STORE BRAND WINNER



Swanson

66 cents per serving



Giant Eagle

52 cents per serving

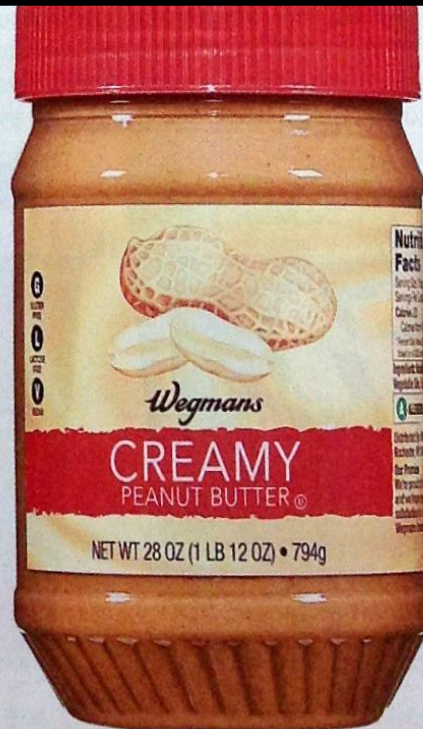
VERDICT Giant Eagle. It's a simple, mild broth with a slight taste of roasted chicken. Swanson's broth tastes highly processed, has hints of dehydrated spice and off-tastes, and varied a bit from one sample to another.

TOSS-UPS



Skippy

20 cents per serving



Wegmans

15 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. Both are fine choices. Skippy is a bit sweeter and slightly more bitter than Wegmans, which has more of a roasted impression.



Ocean Spray

44 cents per serving

Meijer

37 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. They are of about equal (though imperfect) quality. Ocean Spray has more fruit flavor and tastes slightly less "cooked," but it's a bit bitter and has an odd perfumelike note. Meijer is very tart—more sour than sweet. Both contain juices from other fruits, such as grape and apple.

TOSS-UPS



Sunshine

38 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. Sunshine has more sour-dairy flavor (think sour cream), with a cheesy flavor at the finish; Clover Valley is slightly saltier and more toasted.



Clover Valley (Dollar General)

19 cents per serving

TOSS-UPS



Chobani

\$1.31 per serving



Winn-Dixie

\$1.09 per serving

VERDICT Tie. Even for our experts, it was hard to tell these two apart. Both are tasty, but the Winn-Dixie is a bit sweeter, with slightly more dairy flavor.

TOSS-UPS



Friendship

68 cents per serving



H-E-B

31 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. Friendship's small curds are soft, and the product is bland overall. H-E-B's curds are chewy and a bit salty, with a tangy, slightly sour dairy flavor.

TOSS-UPS



Hidden Valley
22 cents per serving

Market Pantry (Target)
10 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. They are of about the same quality, but they taste different. Hidden Valley has black-pepper bits and flavors of Parmesan and Dijon; Market Pantry has more prominent buttermilk and vinegar flavors.



Freihofer's 26 cents per two slices
Hy-Vee 14 cents per two slices

VERDICT Tie. Their textures are similar—soft—but their tastes are not. Freihofer's has mild grain and malt flavors and a caramel color, plus a burnt top that adds bitterness. Hy-Vee looks almost like white bread. It has a yeasty, sourdoughlike flavor and slight off-tastes.

TOSS-UPS



Nature Valley

56 cents per serving



Great Value (Walmart)

33 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. Both are chewy and have nuts, raisins, and dried cranberries. The dried fruit is slightly more flavorful in Nature Valley's bars.

TOSS-UPS



Diamond

52 cents per serving



Kirkland Signature (Costco)

35 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. They're basically interchangeable, but the Kirkland Signature walnuts are slightly sweeter, with a little less roasted flavor.

NAME BRAND WINNERS



Kellogg's
48 cents per serving



VERDICT Kellogg's. Kellogg's, with a pancake-syrup flavor, isn't great, but Essential loses because of slightly chalky oats, with just a few clusters; an oxidized taste; and a lingering bitter aftertaste. It also has more sodium.

Essential Everyday
(Supervalu-Jewel and other chains)
37 cents per serving



Bush's

56 cents per serving



Food Lion

37 cents per serving

VERDICT Bush's. Bush's boasts brown-sugar and molasses flavors, with a slight smoky note. Food Lion has a harsh, ashy artificial smoke flavor, is bitter, and has a metallic off-note. Those drawbacks overwhelm the more subtle flavors of onion and molasses.

NAME BRAND WINNERS



Ben & Jerry's

\$1.12 per serving



Kroger Private Selection

45 cents per serving

VERDICT **Ben & Jerry's.** It has flavorful dark-chocolate chips and lots of big dough chunks that are a bit gritty. Kroger's ice cream is mediocre, and the dough is in small, gritty pellets, with artificial butterscotch and raw-flour flavors.

NAME BRAND WINNERS



Quaker

16 cents per serving



Publix

11 cents per serving

VERDICT Quaker. It has clean, nutty grain flavors with a toasted taste. Publix, on the other hand, is soft and a bit mushy, with lots of broken oat pieces.

NAME BRAND WINNERS



Birds Eye

35 cents per serving



Stop & Shop

31 cents per serving

VERDICT Birds Eye. Its flavorful, fresh-tasting vegetables trounce the starchy, shriveled, low-flavor veggies from Stop & Shop, which also have more sodium.

NAME BRAND WINNERS



Stouffer's
\$1.58 per serving



Eating Right (Safeway)
\$1.50 per serving

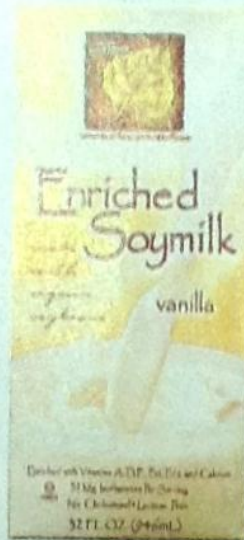
VERDICT Stouffer's. The name-brand lasagna wouldn't be mistaken for homemade, but it's decent. The Eating Right product is dominated by dehydrated-oregano and greasy/fatty flavors. The meat bits are chewy; the noodles, pasty. But Stouffer's has more sodium than Eating Right.

NAME BRAND WINNERS



Soy Dream

84 cents per serving



Price Chopper

40 cents per serving

VERDICT Soy Dream. Soy Dream is sweet and off-white, and has vanilla and slight malt flavors. Price Chopper is thin, beige, and lightly sweetened, with hints of adhesive-bandage and Play-doh-like tastes and a licorice aftertaste.



Tropicana

60 cents per serving



Nice (Walgreens)

28 cents per serving

VERDICT Tropicana. It has distinct orange flavor and is moderately sweet. In Nice, cooked flavors with marmalade and vitamin notes detract from the score, as does a lingering bitterness. Nice is "pasteurized from concentrate"; Tropicana claims its product is "never from concentrate."

SOURCE

“Store-brand taste-off.” Consumer Reports Oct. 2012:16-20