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Punjab Markets Defy Official Food Price Controls

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Soaring food prices in Punjab continue to frustrate consumers, despite recent government efforts to regulate markets through updated price control mechanisms. Shoppers report that the official rate lists do not match what vendors are charging for basic vegetables, poultry, and fruits, raising serious concerns over enforcement and compliance.

In poultry markets across the province, price discrepancies remain severe. The government recently reduced the official price for live chicken to Rs374–388 per kilogram, but consumers report paying up to Rs480 per kilogram in various markets. Similarly, the official

price of chicken meat was Rs562, yet it was widely sold between Rs570 and Rs640. Boneless chicken, in some areas, reached as high as Rs1,200 per kilogram.

Vegetables showed similar inflation trends. A-grade soft-skin potatoes, officially listed at Rs80–85 per kilogram, were sold for Rs140–150. Onion prices, set at Rs50–55, rose to Rs100 in markets. Tomatoes, fixed at Rs82–90 per kilogram, were being sold for Rs150.

Among the most overpriced items were garlic and ginger. Garlic varieties that should have retailed at Rs210–260 per kilogram were instead found at Rs400. Ginger, which had an official price cap of Rs400–460, was available only at Rs600–700.

Other commonly used vegetables such as cucumber, bitter melon, ladyfinger, and brinjal also saw markups of Rs50–100 above sanctioned rates. Even leafy greens like spinach and seasonal vegetables like pumpkin, zucchini, and lemon exceeded official prices.

Fruits have also become unaffordable for many households. Apples, officially priced between Rs145 and Rs265 per kilogram depending on the grade, were sold for up to Rs350. Bananas, a daily staple for many families, showed price hikes of Rs50–90 above the fixed range. Guava and papaya, meanwhile, were either sold at inflated prices or missing entirely from markets.

Middle-income consumers were particularly affected by the pricing of dates, melon, and peaches. Dates, listed officially at Rs460–490 per kilogram, were being sold at shockingly high rates up to Rs2,000 in some shops. Grapes and mangoes, despite adjustments in official pricing, were still selling for up to Rs500 per kilogram.

The widening gap between government-fixed prices and prevailing market rates reflects ongoing challenges in enforcement. Without consistent monitoring, consumers continue to face elevated costs as price regulations remain largely unenforced in many areas.