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Punjab Food Prices Soar Despite New Controls

August 4, 2025

— Categories: *Economics*



Food inflation in Punjab, Pakistan, continues to surge, with prices of essential perishables far exceeding government-set rates, exposing flaws in new price control measures.

Despite the Punjab government's efforts to curb soaring food costs through newly established price control mechanisms, residents across the province are grappling with skyrocketing prices for essential perishable items. The Express Tribune reported on August 3, 2025, that no vegetable is selling below Pakistani Rupee (PKR) 200 per kilogram in many markets, highlighting a stark disconnect between official rates and reality. This persistent inflation is fueling public frustration and raising questions about the effectiveness of the government's regulatory framework.

The Punjab Food Department, tasked with overseeing price controls, has introduced new monitoring units, yet enforcement remains weak. For instance, live chicken, officially priced at PKR 374–388 per kilogram after a PKR 15 reduction, is being sold for up to PKR 480. Chicken meat, set at PKR 562 per kilogram, is retailing between PKR 570–640, while boneless chicken reaches PKR 1,200. Vegetables face similar markups: A-grade potatoes, fixed at PKR 80–85 per kilogram, are sold for PKR 140–150, and onions, listed at PKR 50–55, hit PKR 100. Tomatoes, garlic, and ginger are also significantly overpriced, with garlic retailing at PKR 400 against an official rate of PKR 210–260, according to The Express Tribune.

Fruit prices are equally alarming. Apples, officially priced at PKR 145–265 per kilogram, are sold for up to PKR 350, while dates, set at PKR 460–490, reach PKR 2,000 in some markets. These discrepancies persist despite the government's attempts to regulate through price monitoring teams, which critics argue lack the authority or will to penalize violators. Former Finance Minister Salman Shah, in an interview with The Express Tribune, criticized the system, stating that artificial measures and unrealistic rate lists fail to address inflation effectively.

The failure of these initiatives underscores deeper systemic issues, including inadequate enforcement and bureaucratic inefficiencies. As food inflation squeezes low- and middle-income households, public trust in the Punjab government's ability to stabilize markets is waning. Without stronger action to hold vendors accountable, families will continue to bear the burden of unchecked price hikes, threatening economic stability in the region.