When the Weather Sets the Price of Dinner

As extreme weather batters harvests across the globe, economists warn that a permanent new cost is quietly rewriting the price of every grocery receipt.

For most of modern history, food prices rose and fell for reasons that felt distinctly human: wars, oil shocks, trade disputes. Today a quieter force is reshaping the checkout receipt, and it answers to no negotiator. Economists have started calling it climateflation, the steady upward pressure that a warming planet exerts on the cost of feeding ourselves. What once read like a distant forecast now arrives with every weekly shop.

The mechanism is brutally simple. When drought scorches southern Europe, olive groves wither and prices double within a single season. When rainfall collapses in Brazil, the world's coffee crop suffers, and one recent year saw global coffee prices climb by more than half. A single failed harvest[1] in one region can now empty supermarket shelves on the other side of the planet, because wealthy importing nations have quietly grown dependent on farmland that is acutely exposed to a changing climate.

The scale is difficult to overstate. Research published in the journal Nature suggests that rising temperatures could add between one and three percent to global food prices every single year until 2035. Should current warming trends hold, the cumulative climate-driven increase by that date may reach thirty to fifty percent. Britain offers a preview: between 2021 and mid-2026, food prices rose by roughly a third, and the heaviest burden[2] fell on the poorest households, who now spend nearly thirteen percent of their disposable income on food.

Not every product moves at the same speed. According to a 2026 analysis, the five most climate-sensitive staples, including butter, beef, milk, coffee and chocolate, are inflating six times faster than the average of all other food and drink. These are not luxuries; they are the ingredients of an ordinary weekly menu.

Climate change does not merely shrink the crop in the field. It also inflates the cost of growing it. As extreme weather erodes[3] the fertility of the soil, farmers must reach for more water and more chemical or organic input, precisely as those inputs become expensive. The World Bank expects fertiliser prices to rise by an average of thirty-one percent in 2026, pushing affordability to its lowest point since 2022. Every squeeze on the margin of a farm eventually reaches the price tag on the shelf.

Governments have added their own weight. Post-Brexit border checks, new packaging rules and fresh regulation[4] have, according to the food industry, become leading drivers of inflation now that energy and raw agricultural costs have steadied. Meanwhile the World Bank warns of a probable new El Niño event stretching into 2027, threatening rice and sugar output across Asia and tightening global stocks further still.

The consequence is a subtle rewiring of daily life. More than half of British adults now keep a formal budget, and most say they do so simply to cover essentials. What looks like a temporary shock is hardening into a permanent feature of the commodity[5] economy, one in which insurance costs climb, transport routes buckle under floods, and prices no longer soar[6] only in a crisis. They simply stay high, quietly, permanently, at the bottom of every receipt.

VOCABULARY — KEY WORDS FROM THE STORY

# WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1 harvest *noun*	the crop that is gathered from the land in a single season, or the act of gathering it.	*"A poor grain harvest in the region forced the country to import wheat for the first time in a decade."*
2 burden *noun*	a heavy responsibility, cost, or difficulty that is hard to bear.	*"The rising rent placed an unbearable financial burden on young families in the city."*
3 erode *verb*	to gradually wear away, weaken, or destroy something over time.	*"Years of rising prices slowly eroded the purchasing power of ordinary wages."*
4 regulation *noun*	an official rule made by a government or authority to control how something is done.	*"New safety regulations forced the factory to redesign its entire production line."*
5 commodity *noun*	a raw material or basic product that can be bought and sold, such as grain, oil, or metal.	*"When the price of essential commodities rises, the effect is felt by nearly every household."*
6 soar *verb*	to rise or increase very quickly to a high level.	*"Demand for air conditioning soared as the summer heatwave intensified."*

COMPREHENSION — ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1 – MULTIPLE CHOICE

What central distinction does the writer draw between traditional food price rises and 'climateflation'?

A-) Climateflation is caused by human negotiation, while older shocks were natural.

B-) Climateflation stems from an impersonal force that cannot be bargained with, unlike wars or trade disputes.

C-) Climateflation only affects luxury goods rather than everyday staples.

D-) Climateflation is a temporary shock that will soon reverse itself.

QUESTION 2 – MULTIPLE CHOICE

According to the essay, why can a single failed harvest in one region affect shoppers on the other side of the world?

A-) Because all food is now grown in a single global region.

B-) Because wealthy importing nations depend on farmland that is highly exposed to climate change.

C-) Because governments deliberately ship food away from where it is grown.

D-) Because consumers refuse to buy locally produced goods.

QUESTION 3 – SHORT ANSWER

The essay argues that climateflation 'compounds itself'. Explain in your own words how climate change raises food prices through more than one channel at the same time.

Answer Key & Vocabulary Guide

Study Date: ____ / ____ / 20____

COMPREHENSION ANSWERS

My score today ____ / 3

Q1 Climateflation stems from an impersonal force that cannot be bargained with, unlike wars or trade disputes. ✓ Correct (B)

The opening paragraph contrasts prices that once rose for 'distinctly human' reasons with a 'quieter force' that 'answers to no negotiator'. This framing of an impersonal, non-negotiable driver is the essay's core distinction, making the second option correct while the others reverse or contradict the text.

Q2 Because wealthy importing nations depend on farmland that is highly exposed to climate change. ✓ Correct (B)

The second paragraph states that a failed harvest 'can now empty supermarket shelves on the other side of the planet, because wealthy importing nations have quietly grown dependent on farmland that is acutely exposed to a changing climate.' This dependence on vulnerable overseas farmland is the stated cause.

Q3 **Answer:** Climate change drives up food prices through at least two reinforcing channels. First, on the supply side, extreme weather such as drought or flooding directly reduces the size of harvests, so scarcity itself lifts prices. Second, on the production-cost side, the same conditions erode soil fertility, forcing farmers to buy more water and more fertiliser at a time when those inputs are becoming more expensive. Higher production costs then squeeze farm profit margins, which are passed on to shoppers. Because supply shrinks while the cost of growing food rises simultaneously, the two effects stack on top of each other, producing a stronger and more persistent price increase than either would alone.

Explanation: A strong answer must identify at least two distinct mechanisms (reduced yield/scarcity and higher input or production costs) and explain how they interact rather than listing them in isolation. Credit should be given for referencing specific textual evidence such as eroded soil fertility, rising fertiliser costs, or squeezed margins, and for using the idea of 'compounding' to show the effects reinforce one another.

VOCABULARY — TRANSLATION & NOTES

harvest
Common collocations: 'a good/poor/failed harvest' and 'to bring in the harvest'. It functions as both a noun and a verb ('to harvest wheat').

burden
Often paired with 'financial', 'tax', or 'administrative'. You 'bear', 'carry', 'ease', or 'shoulder' a burden. Note the phrase 'the burden falls on someone'.

erode
Used both literally (soil or rock erodes) and figuratively (trust, confidence, or value erodes). The related noun is 'erosion'.

regulation
Frequently plural ('regulations'). Common collocations: 'strict/tight regulation', 'to comply with regulations', and 'to tighten/relax regulation'.

commodity
Often used in 'commodity prices' and 'commodity markets'. It refers to standardised, tradeable goods rather than finished or branded items.

soar
Typically used for prices, temperatures, costs, or numbers rising sharply. The opposite for a sharp fall is 'plummet'. It is stronger than 'rise'.

YOUR TURN — SENTENCE BUILDING

Mastery comes from practice. Write original sentences using today's target vocabulary.

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________
4. ______________________________
5. ______________________________
6. ______________________________