The price-increase spinoff from costlier sugar, grain and vegetable oil has left Billings shoppers numb.

“They are used to finding an item with a higher price tag than the last time they bought it. So they don’t comment much, unless they buy sugar,” said a check-out clerk.

Sugar now costs $1.99 for five pounds of white granulated. It was 84 cents on Oct. 17, 1973. In August, when the last survey was made by the Gazette, it was $1.83.

The variance in the sugar price between the five stores surveyed was only a penny. When the survey began two years ago, sugar prices in the five stores varied from 67 to 73 cents for the 5-pound sack.

The Round Box of breakfast oatmeal that was 35 cents a year ago is now 50 cents. A brand of margarine that was 43 cents is now 67 cents.

In contrast, the pound of sweet cream butter that cost $1.06 a year ago now sells for 99 cents in Billings.

Some hefty price increases seem tied to the increased sugar cost. Average prices now and a year ago (in parentheses) include: grape jelly 56 (36) cents; chocolate syrup 45 (27) cents; gelatin dessert powder 19 (12) cents; catsup 43 (35) cents; sweet pickle relish 44 (37) cents; six-pack of canned cola $1.42 (99 cents); frozen orange drink 70 (59) cents; cream-style cookies 81 (68) cents; and a half-gallon of ice cream $1.12 ($1.06).

Canned fruit prices also reflect sugar content—apricots 55 (45) cents; fruit cocktail 47 (39) cents; and the larger can of pars 75 (59) cents.

Although the price for five pounds of white flour averages less than a cent different than a year ago at $1.06, related products have higher prices. Some examples are: saltines 64 (49) cents; bread 59 (82) cents and a box of pretzels 59 (56) cents.

A 24-ounce bottle of corn oil now cost $1.28; it was 86 cents a year ago. A bottle of Italian salad dressing, mostly oil, has risen from 43 to 51 cents in a year.

This past year ground coffee rose from $1.19 a pound to $1.37, and instant coffee from $1.29 to $1.64. A box of 48 tea bags is 80 cents, and had been 66 cents.

Grain prices have caused these increases in a year: corn flakes 46 (33) cents; rice 57 (29) cents, and beans 54 (45) cents.

Some other items in the survey and the price a year ago, averaged to the nearest cent:
Canned milk 30 (23); 8-ounce boxed American cheese 77 (64); frozen lemonade 19 (14); orange juice 24 (24); spinach 25 (22); broccoli 33 (32); French fries 43 (32).
Canned peas 36 (26); tomatoes 35 (26); bean soup 27 (19); chicken soup 23 (20); tomato soup 19 (14); prepared canned spaghetti 25 (20); potato flakes 44 (31); baby food 14 (13); bar soap 32 (14); toilet tissue 66 (47); laundry soap powder $1.14 (98); frozen turkey dinner 66 (61); sardines 50 (34); bottled fresh orange juice 63 (58).