Diet soda prices coming down

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The soaring price of sugar actually may save money for consumers who prefer diet soda.

An Associated Press spot check shows some wholesalers and retailers are abandoning the traditional practice of pricing all soft drinks at the same level — regardless of the sugar content.

A spokesman for Farmer Jack Supermarkets in Detroit said the Midwest chain, which is operated by Borman's Inc., was lowering the price of all sugar-free soft drinks to reflect the fact that they cost less. He said the decreases ranged from 6 to 9 per cent.

"The manufacturers' pricing and promotional allowances have created real cost differentials between regular and diet varieties," said Paul Borman, president of the company. "We believe the consumer is entitled to have these differentials passed on to them in the form of lower prices."

Soft drink bottlers who set prices at local or regional levels traditionally charged the same amount for regular and diet soda, arguing that the cost differential wasn't very great. All that is changing now.

Supermarkets have been urging customers not to buy sugar. Nutrition experts suggest artificial sweeteners and point out that most people don't really need the sugar they're eating. Some stores have been offering discounts on sugar-free items like fruit, yogurt and unsweetened cereal.