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## Economists: Shoppers Should Seek Sales Sooner

POSTED: 7:38 pm CST November 5, 2009  
UPDATED: 8:00 pm CST November 5, 2009



**ROGERS, Ark.** -- Holiday displays are already popping up in store windows across Arkansas, but some economists say it might be better for shoppers to take advantage of those holiday items sooner than later this year.

Some stores are scaling back their budgets this year and that means their shelves might not stay stocked as long as they normally do.

Cheryl Howard and her family made a trip from Berryville to Rogers to get a head start on their Christmas shopping Thursday, and they're looking extra hard for the best deals.

"Looking at little bit closer at items ... making sure they're going to be things we can really use, not just fun things anymore," Howard said.

But that task has proved to be especially difficult this year because many of those items aren't in the stores.

"Now we walk into the store and the items are limited and the variety is limited," Howard said.

Economist Jeff Cooperstein of the University of Arkansas said it's because many stores just aren't buying as much inventory.

"They might not be stocking the same variety of products that they were stocking previously," Cooperstein said.

He said that's because many store borrow money to purchase items, and with credit still being very tight nationwide, those stores can't afford to purchase more inventory than they will actually be able to sell.

"You can still buy a lot of your products but you can't carry as great a variety because that requires a bigger investment," Cooperstein said.

That means the biggest bargains may still come right before Christmas, but with a catch.

"You may get better deals at the end of the holiday season but your choices are going to be more limited," Cooperstein said.

Cooperstein said buyer confidence is still at a low point partly because the current state unemployment rate is higher than it was this same time last year. He also said it's hard to tell how overall sales will go this holiday season mainly because economists can't seem to agree if the recession is actually over.

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