

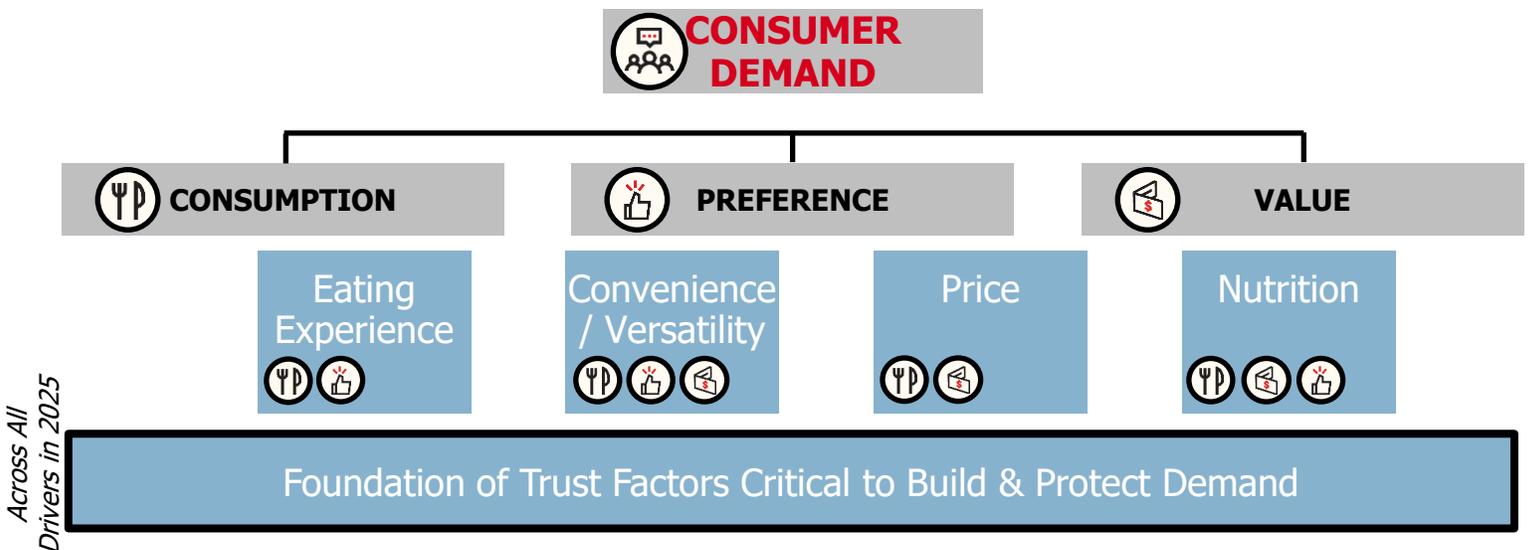
Beef Industry Review and Consumer Insights: February 2026 Edition

Despite economic headwinds in 2025 — including inflation uncertainty, international conflict, and tighter beef inventories — consumer demand for beef remained exceptionally strong. The industry achieved another record-setting year, with retail beef sales surpassing **\$45 billion** and volume exceeding **6.2 billion** pounds, marking a **12.4% increase in value** and **4.3% growth in volume year-over-year**. Beef continues to dominate the meat case, driving **over 55% of total fresh meat value**, compared to chicken at roughly **25%** and pork at just above **10%**.¹

As we move into 2026, beef supply is projected to hold steady, and consumers show no signs of reducing demand. However, economic pressures are influencing behavior: households are dining out less, prioritizing home-cooked meals, and adopting strategies to stretch their budgets.² These include:

- Seeking deals and using coupons more frequently
- Stocking up and freezing beef products
- Opting for store or private-label brands
- Shopping at mass merchandisers
- Repurposing leftovers creatively

Consumer Demand Drivers are based on self-reported consumer data collected through the Consumer Beef Tracker. These insights help determine what components are driving consumption, the preference of one protein over another, and the value of a protein.



Source: Demand Drivers Report January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024; N=12000. Independent analysis of self-reported consumer data, commissioned by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff

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These behaviors align with the **Value and Versatility** demand driver and reinforce the importance of recipe resources like www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com.

Looking ahead, reinforcing beef's **competitive advantages** will be critical, including:

- **Top source of high-quality protein**
- **Superior taste and eating experience**
- **Nutritional benefits that fit healthy diets**
- **Ideal for social gatherings & special occasions**
- **Convenience & versatility across meal types**

Additional insights to note:

- **Consumer perception of beef remains positive:** Over 90% expressing favorable or neutral views, and 70% considering how food is raised when purchasing.
- **Price sensitivity is growing:** Willingness-to-pay for steak and ground beef is lagging behind actual retail prices, underscoring the need to communicate value.
- **Behavioral trends:** Consumers plan to buy more ground beef and chicken while cutting back on higher-priced cuts like steak.
- **Protein preferences:** Nearly three-quarters of consumers eat beef weekly, and over one-third rank it as their top protein choice.
- **Foodservice outlook:** Beef volume surpassed 2019 levels and is projected to grow through 2027, though chicken remains dominant in restaurants.
- **Meat alternatives:** Weekly consumption continues to decline, reinforcing beef's strong position in the protein market.

Sources:

1. Circana, Fresh Beef Sales by Volume and Value, Data Ending 12/28/2025.
2. Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.

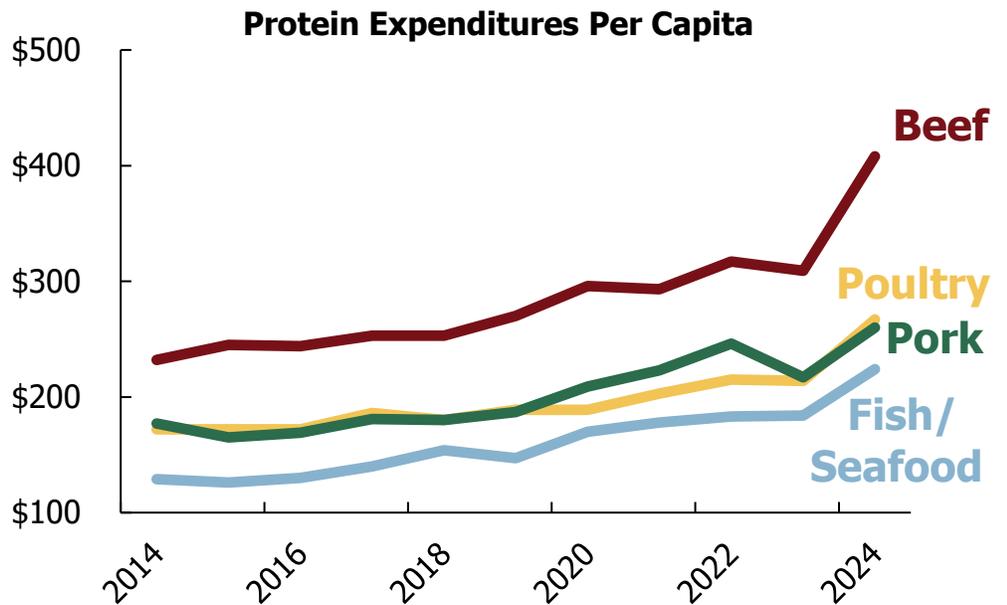
Fresh Meat Retail Sales Insights & Consumer Expenditures

Beef continues its record setting pace as both beef volume and total value of fresh beef sales at retail are up 4.3% and 12.4%, respectively.

Retail Fresh Meat Sales, 2025	\$ 52 wks Ending 12/28 v. YAGO	Lbs. 52 wks Ending 12/28 v. YAGO
+9.1% \$ sales growth	 +12.4% \$45B v. \$40.1B	+4.3% 6.2B v. 6.0B lbs.
+3.0% Lbs. sales growth	 +6.5% \$20.7B v. \$19.4B	+3.2% 6.5B v. 6.3B lbs.
	 +3.3% \$8.72B v. \$8.5B	+1.1% 2.7B v. 2.64B lbs.
	 -11.1% \$223M v. \$262M	-8.8% 34.3M v. 37.6M lbs.

Source: Circana, Fresh Beef Sales by Volume and Value, Data Ending 12/28/2025. Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

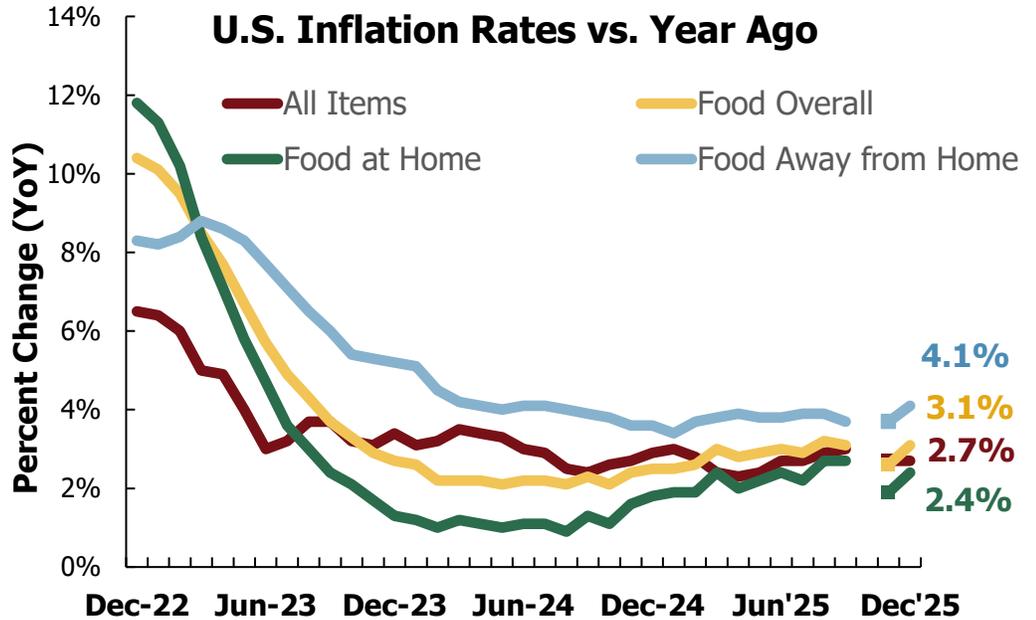
Beef expenditures increased over 30% from 2023 to 2024, exceeding year-over-year gains of all other proteins.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. December 2025. Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

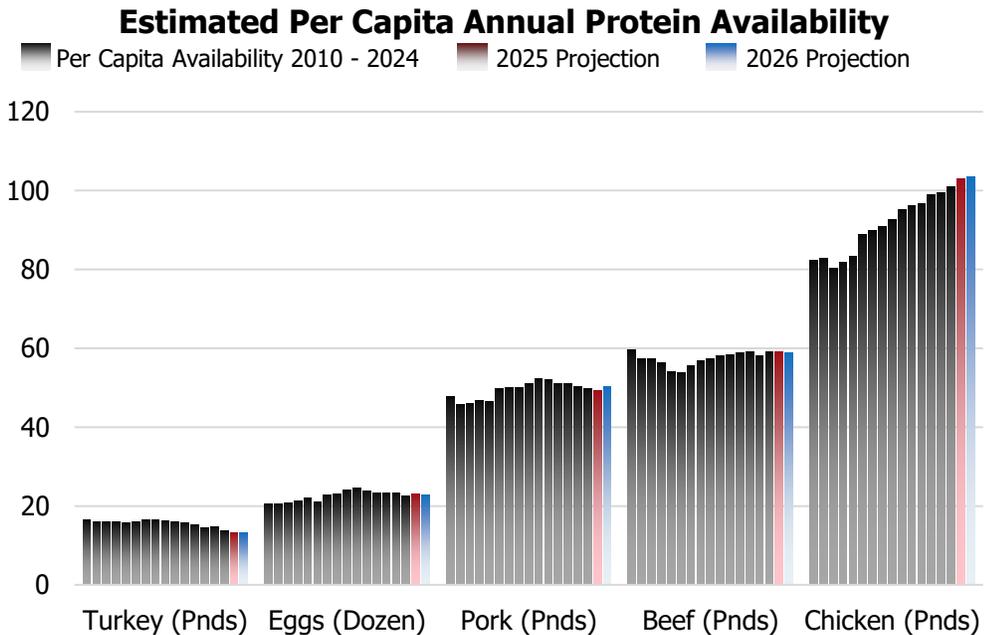
Inflationary Trends & Protein Availability

Food away from home inflation continues to outpace food at home inflation, hovering in the 3.4% to 4.1% range for 2025, primarily driven by higher production input costs.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index, Not Seasonally Adjusted, January 2026 Release.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Despite headwinds associated with cattle supply, beef availability is projected to hold steady into 2026.

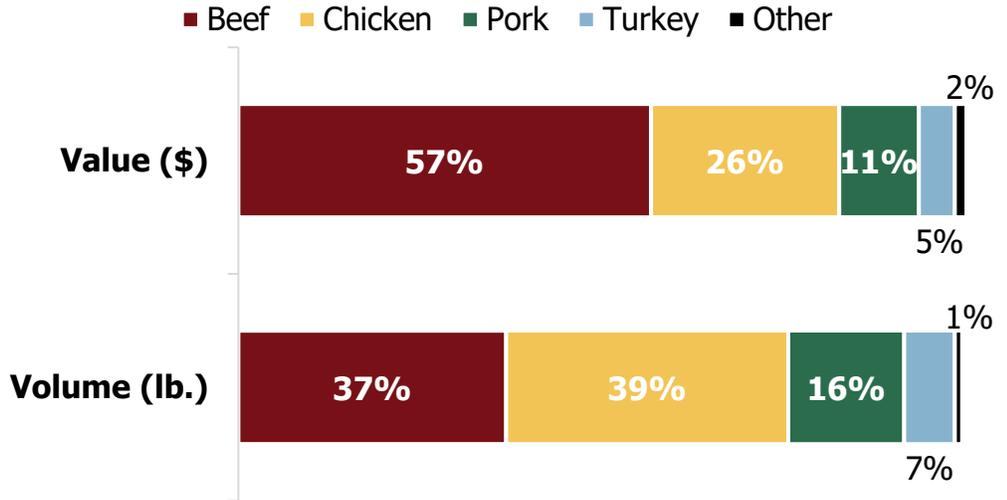


Source: USDA, Office of the Chief Economist, "World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates Report: January 2026" and Supporting Materials.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Retail Market Insights

Beef occupies a **majority** of the **retail fresh meat sales** in terms of dollars and has one of the largest shares in terms of volume sales.

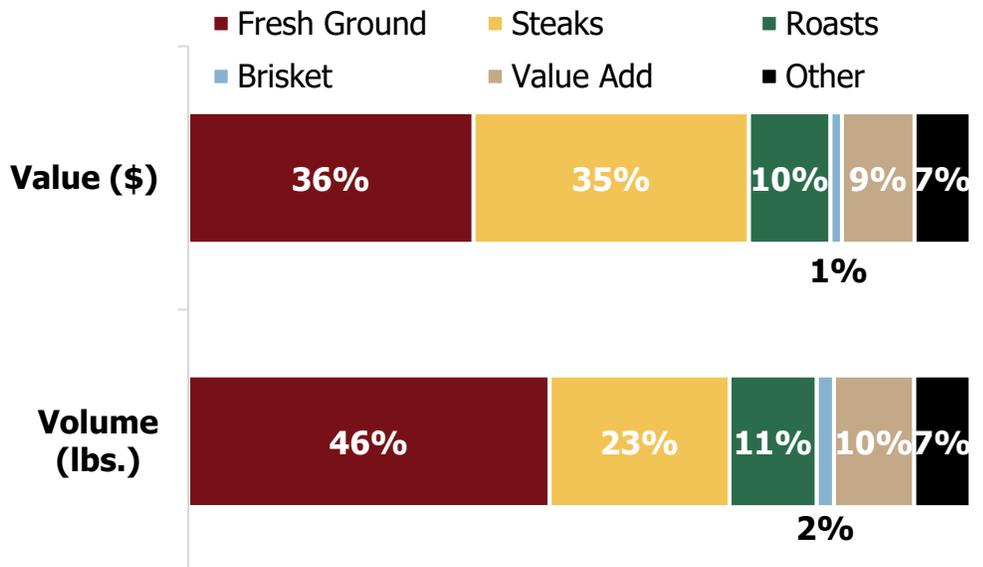
Fresh Meat Retail Market Shares by Protein



Note: Other is comprised of proteins that alone occupy less than 1% of the market. These include Bison, Fowl, Lamb, Meat Alternatives, Mixed, Veal, and Remaining Protein.
 Source: Circana, Retail Protein Sales, 52 weeks ending 12/28/2025.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Both **fresh ground beef** and **steaks** make up **more than 70%** of the total beef **value** while consumers continue to seek value and versatility with fresh ground, roasts and value-added cuts.

Retail Fresh Beef Market Share by Form

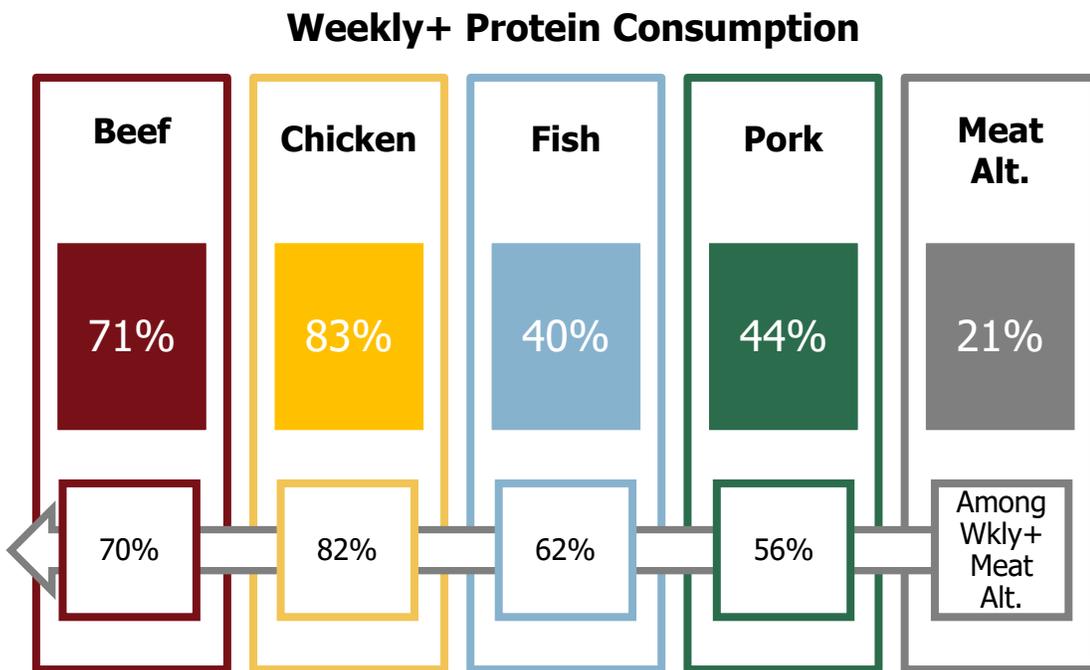


Note: The "Other" category is comprised of offals, other beef, and ribs.
 Source: Circana, Retail Protein Sales, 52 weeks ending 12/28/2025.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Consumer Protein Preferences

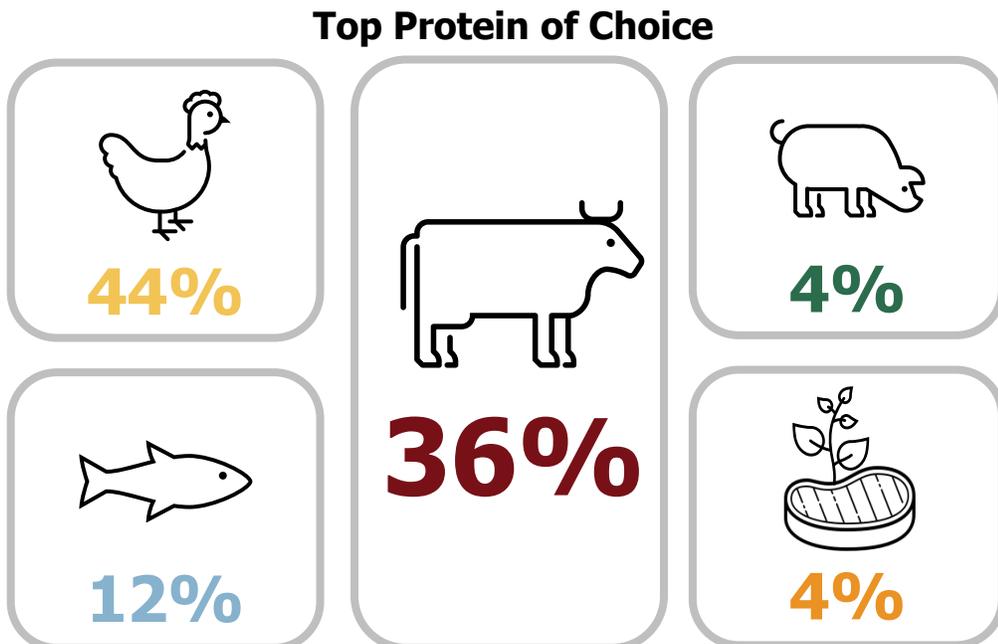
Historically, chicken is the protein the greatest number of U.S. consumers eat weekly. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ eat beef at least weekly.

Weekly consumption of meat alternatives has trended down from 31% in 2021 to 20% in 2025.



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of consumers say beef is their top protein of choice.

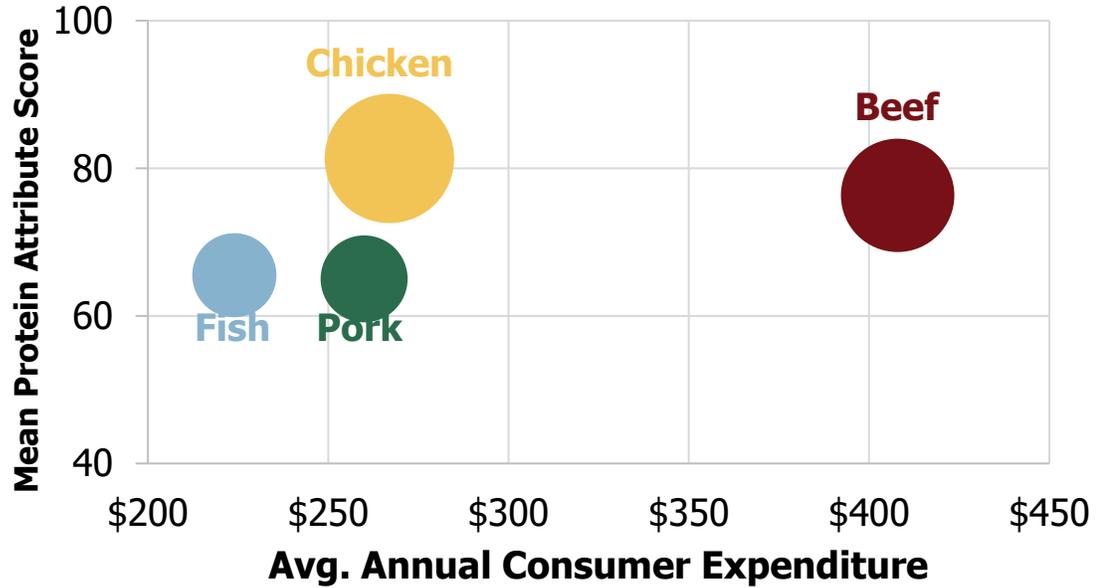


Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Beef Demand Driver: Convenience & Versatility

Beef and chicken noted as top choices for “Good for Many Types of Meals”.

Good For Many Types of Meals by Expenditure

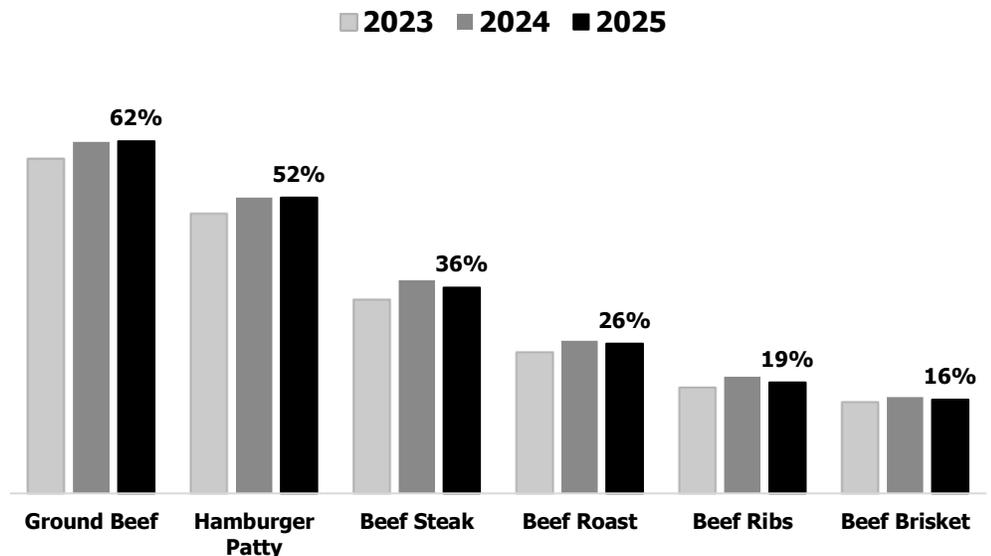


How to read: Vertical Axis – mean score for 0-100, good for many types of meals; Horizontal Axis – annual per capita expenditure on protein; bubble size – reflects weekly+ consumption of protein.

Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025. Consumer Expenditure Surveys 2024, data released December 19, 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Beef is a versatile protein which consumers enjoy at home in a variety of ways. A majority of respondents indicate they have eaten ground beef as an ingredient or a hamburger patty at home in the past week.

Beef Eaten at Home in the Past Week

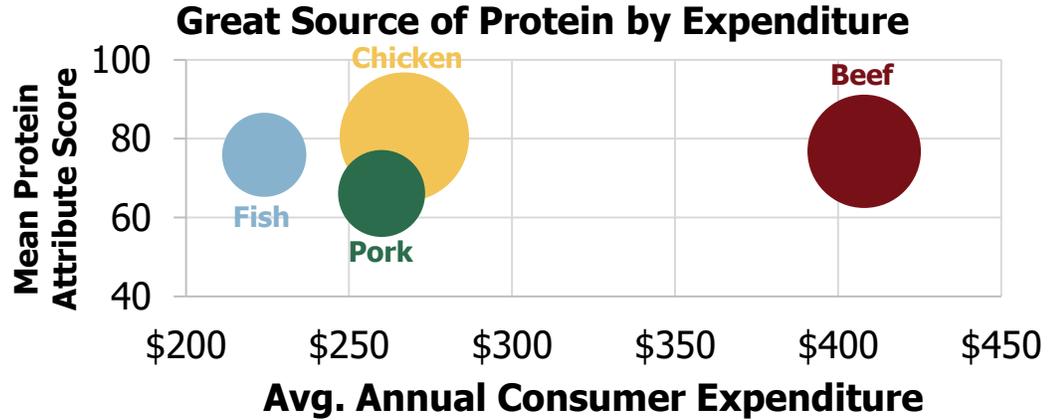


Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, 2023 – 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Beef Demand Driver: Nutrition

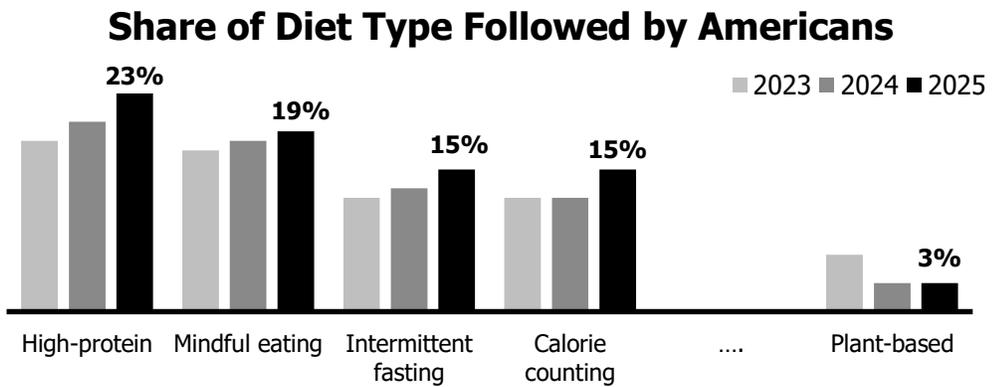
Beef, chicken and fish viewed as **great sources of protein**.

How to read: Vertical Axis – mean score for 0-100, great source of protein; Horizontal Axis – annual per capita expenditure on protein; bubble size – reflects weekly+ consumption of protein.



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025. Consumer Expenditure Surveys 2024, data released December 19, 2025.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

In 2025, 57% of Americans reported following some type of diet. Among those following a diet, year-over-year, **high-protein diets** saw an **increase** in popularity in 2025.



Source: IFIC Food & Health Survey, 2025.

Protein content is a motivation for those who plan to eat more beef, while perceived negative health and nutritional traits are reasons to eat less.

Reasons to Eat Less Beef 12%

- Price is too expensive
- Other meats are healthier
- Concern beef will negatively impact long-term health
- Beef has too much fat
- Cutting back due to health conditions

Reasons to Eat More Beef 15%

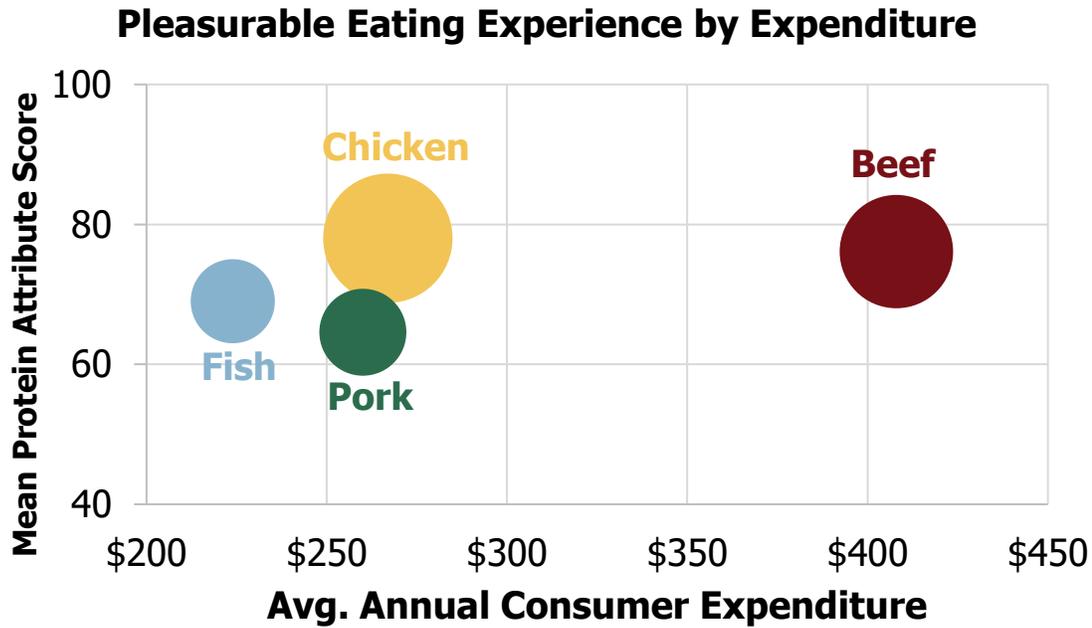
- Enjoy the taste
- Adding protein to your diet
- Grilling more often
- Beef is quick & easy to prepare
- Lean beef fits a healthy diet

Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.

*6% report they do not eat beef, 67% do not intend to change their beef consumption.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Beef Demand Driver: Eating Experience

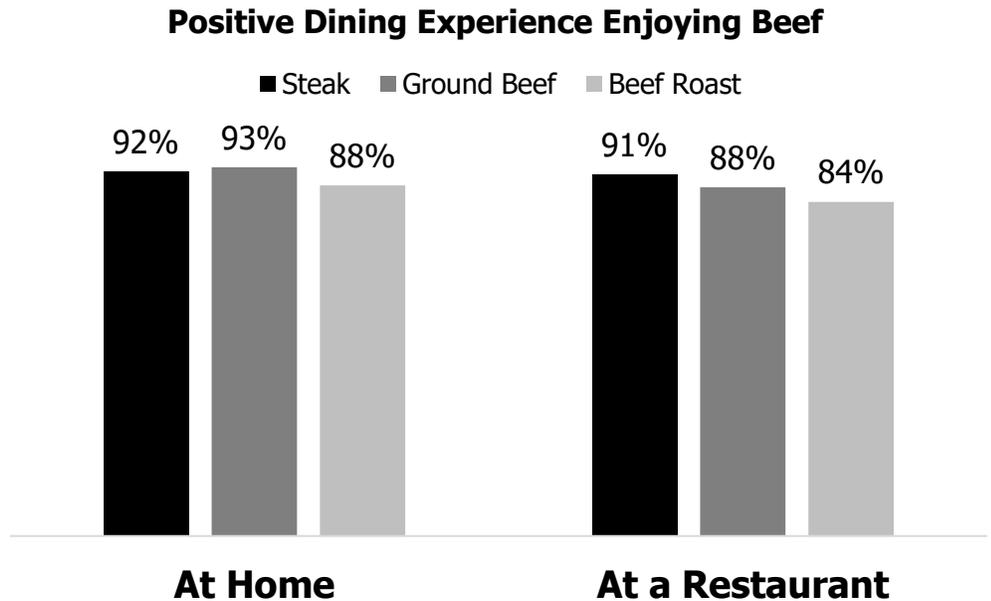
Beef and chicken are the “go-to” proteins for pleasurable eating experience.



How to read: Vertical Axis – mean score for 0-100, pleasurable eating experience; Horizontal Axis – annual per capita expenditure on protein; bubble size – reflects weekly+ consumption of protein.

Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025. Consumer Expenditure Surveys 2024, data released December 19, 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Whether dining out or eating beef at home, consumers consistently report a positive beef eating experience.



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Beef Demand Driver: Raised & Grown

Over **90%** of consumers express a **positive** to neutral **perception** of beef as a protein.

When considering how cattle are raised for food, **80%** respond **positive** to neutral.

Consumer Perception of Beef

■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive

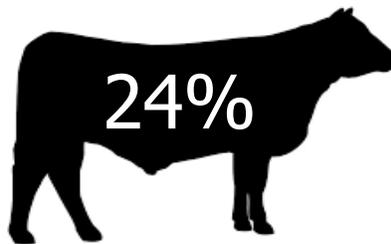


Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

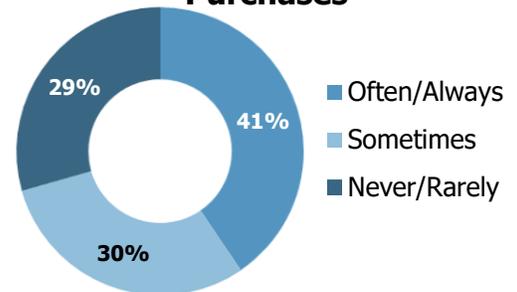
Less than 1/4 of consumers feel they **know a lot** about how cattle are raised for food.

When making purchasing decisions, **70%** **consider** how an **animal is raised**.

Claim to Know A Lot About How Cattle Are Raised



Consider How Food Was Raised/Grown When Making Purchases

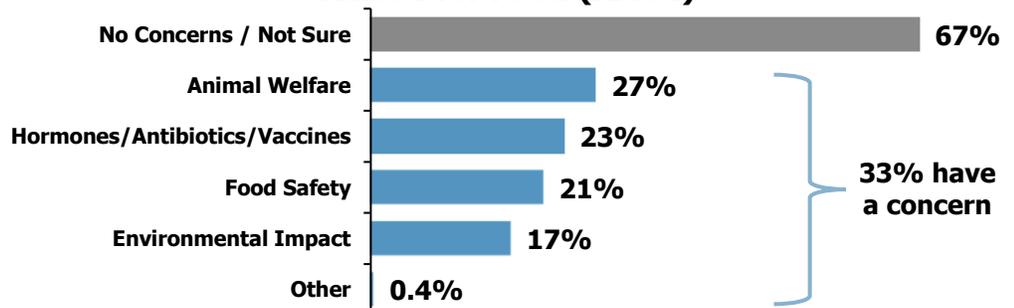


Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

2/3 of consumers indicate they have **no concerns** about how cattle are raised for food.

Of the 33% who do have a concern, **animal welfare** is most commonly cited.

Consumer Concerns with How Cattle are Raised for Food (Aided)

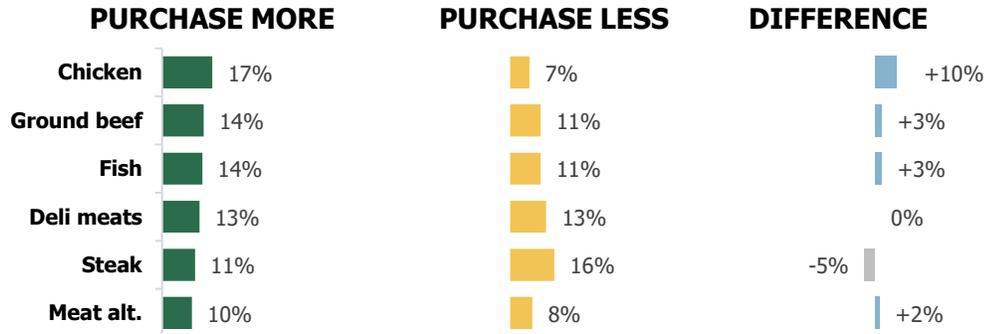


Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Consumer Behavior Trends

Consumers indicate they plan to purchase **more** chicken, **ground beef**, and fish, while cutting back on higher-priced cuts of beef such as steak compared to last year.

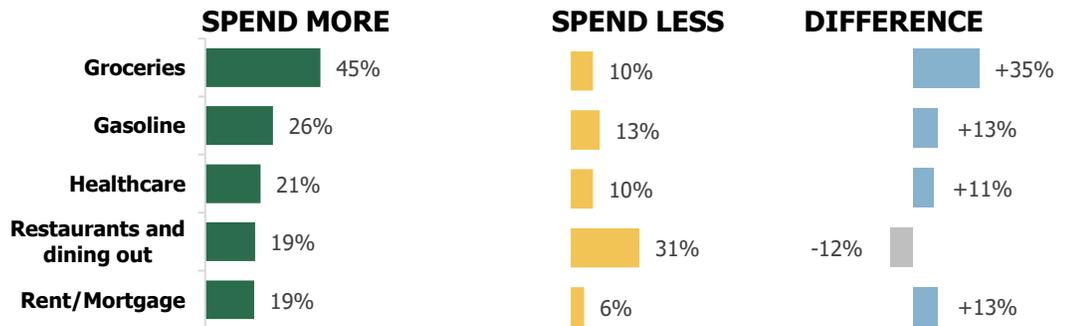
Future Protein Purchasing Plans



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Over the past six months, consumers are **spending more** on essential items like **food, gas, and housing**, but less on non-essentials such as dining out, clothing, and entertainment.

Spending Compared to 6 Months Ago



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Consumers anticipate changing their behavior in the next six months by **looking for deals, dining out less**, using leftovers, and stocking up, or freezing items more often.

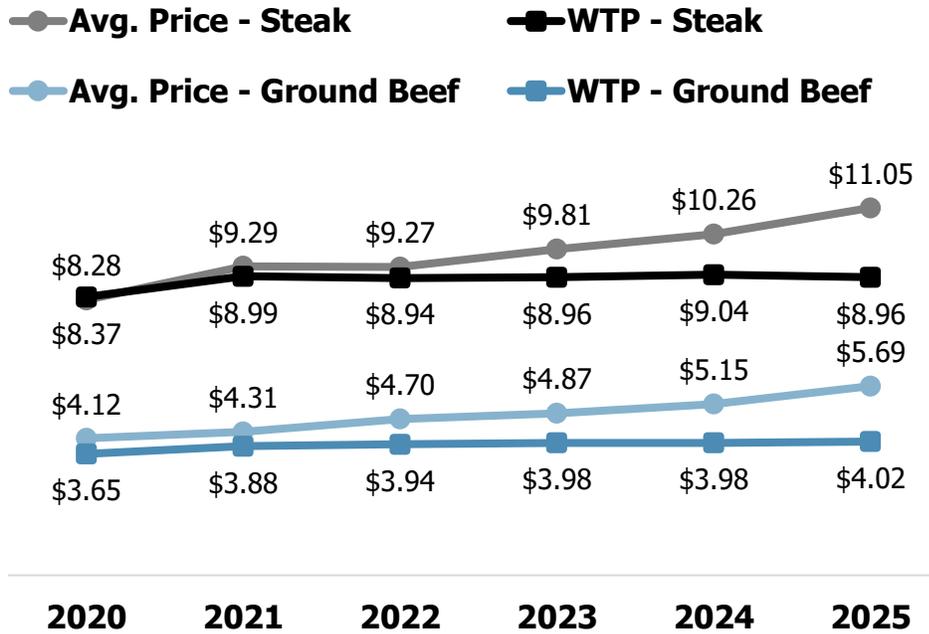
Shopping & Dining Habits: Next 6 Months



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

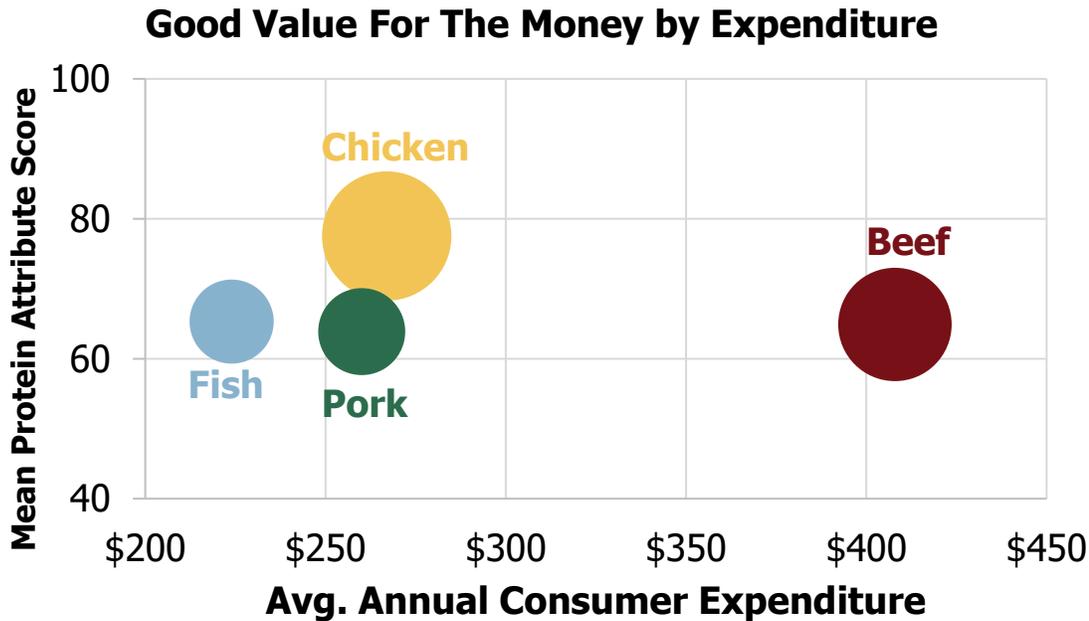
Consumer Perception of Beef Prices

The price per pound consumers indicate they are **willing to pay** for ground beef and steak is **not keeping pace** with average retail prices.



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker 2020 - 2025. Circana, Retail Protein Sales ending 12/28/2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Likely driven by marketplace conditions, **chicken** viewed as **top protein** as it relates to **value for the money**.



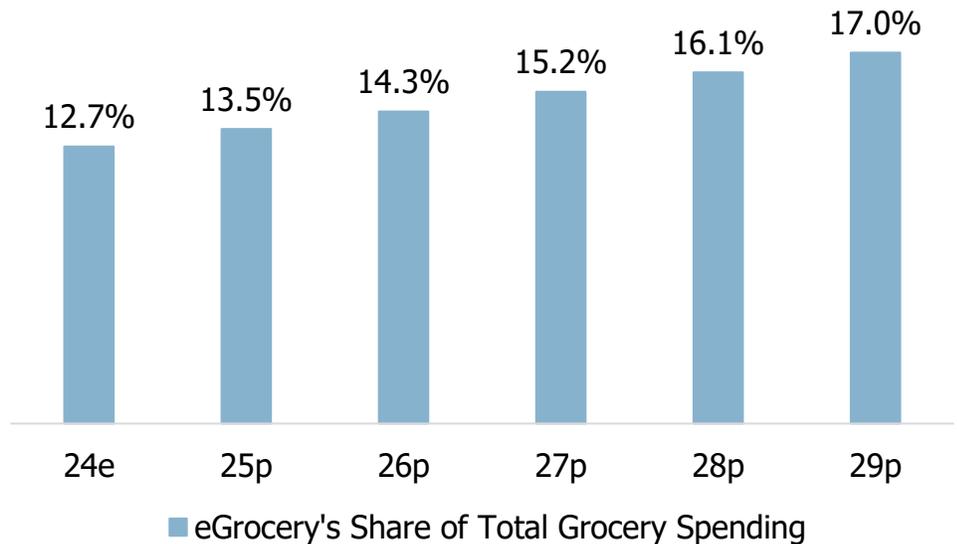
How to read: Vertical Axis – mean score for 0-100, good value for the money; Horizontal Axis – annual per capita expenditure on protein; bubble size – reflects weekly+ consumption of protein.

Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025. Consumer Expenditure Surveys 2024, data released December 19, 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Consumer Grocery Online Shopping Trends

In the next few years, the value of **online grocery sales** are projected to increase and stabilize at roughly **17% of total U.S. grocery sales**.

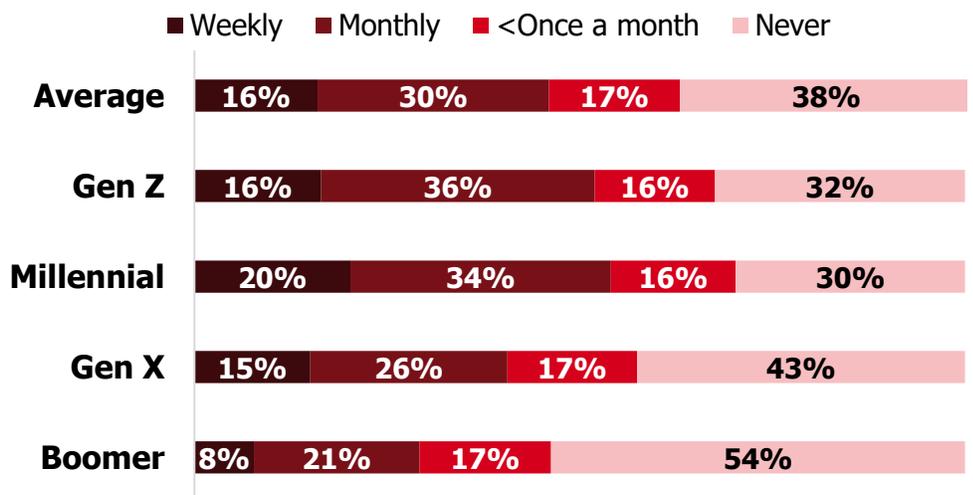
Share of U.S. Grocery Sales Going Online: 2024-2029



Note: e=Estimate, p=Projection.
 Source: Brick Meets Click 5-Year eGrocery Sales Forecast, June 2025.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Over 50% of **Millennials and Gen Z** shop for groceries **online** at least once a month.

Frequency of Online Grocery Orders by Generation

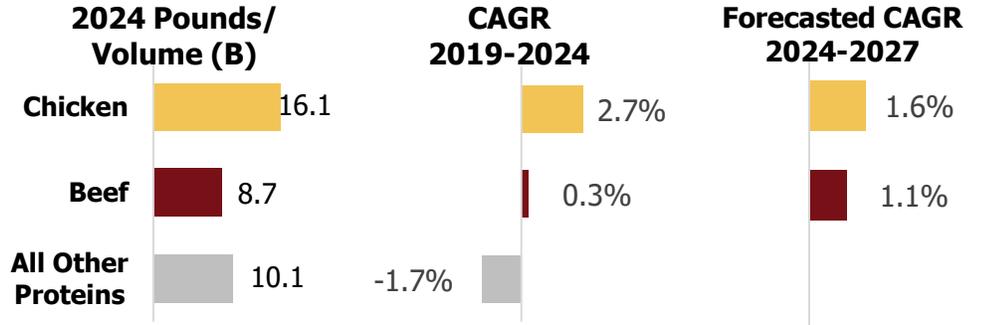


Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
 Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Foodservice: Beef Sales

At foodservice, chicken is the largest protein and has outperformed other protein categories since 2019. **Beef pounds volume** is expected to **grow** at a faster rate through 2027, though chicken will still outpace beef growth.

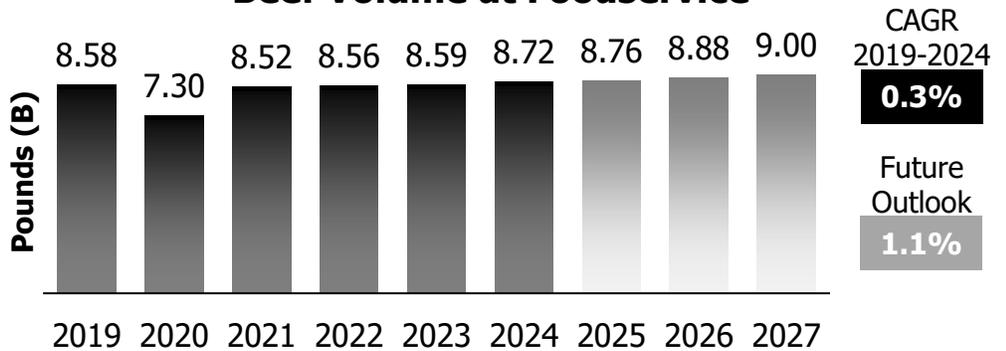
Foodservice Protein Performance Overview



Note: CAGR=Compound Annual Growth Rate.
Source: Circana Foodservice Category Sizing, 12 Month Ending December 2024.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Beef **volume surpassed** 2019 levels in 2023 and **continued to grow** through 2024.

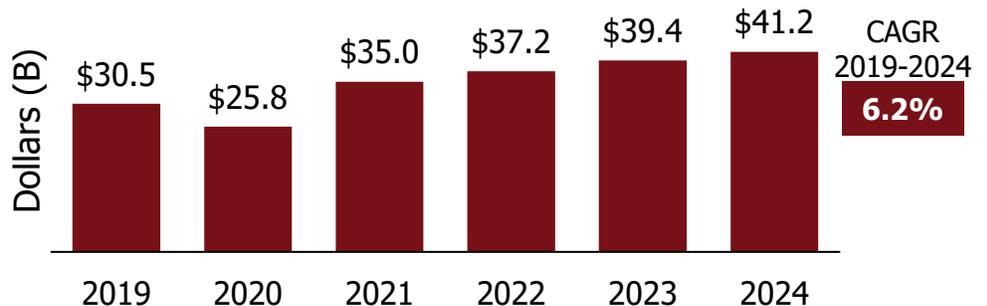
Beef Volume at Foodservice



Note: CAGR=Compound Annual Growth Rate.
Source: Circana Foodservice Category Sizing, 12 Month Ending December 2024.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Operator spend in the beef category increased at an average rate of **+6% YOY** from 2019-2024, driven by **increased price per pound**.

Beef Category Dollars (Operator Spend)

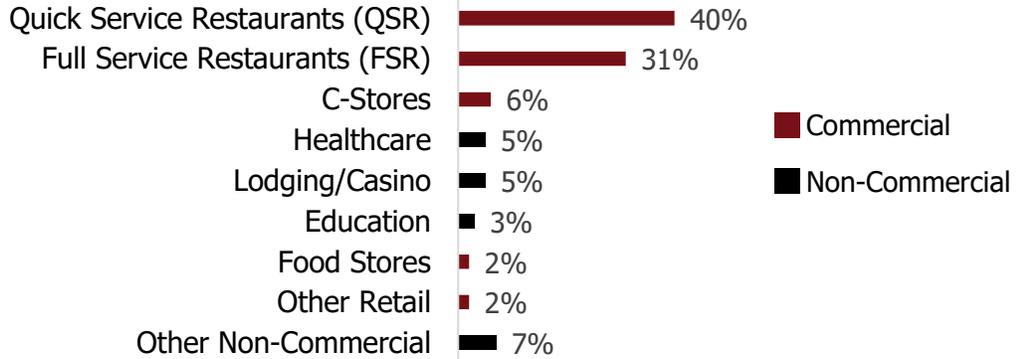


Note: CAGR=Compound Annual Growth Rate.
Source: Circana Foodservice Category Sizing, 12 Month Ending December 2024.
Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Foodservice: Restaurant Insights

Quick service and full service restaurants make up **more than 70%** of **beef commercial sales**.

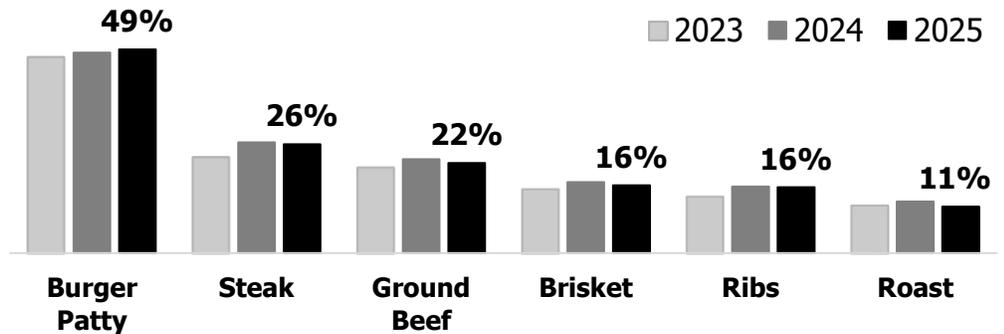
Market Share of Beef Sales (\$)



Source: Circana Foodservice Category Sizing, 12 Month Ending December 2024.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Nearly half of consumers report eating a **beef burger patty** at a restaurant in the past week in 2025, followed by over $\frac{1}{4}$ who ordered **steak**.

Beef Eaten in Past Week at a Restaurant



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker 2023 – 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to The Beef Checkoff.

Beef has a commanding presence on menus across the U.S. Beef pairs well with a variety of ingredients and flavors, as demonstrated by these pairings gaining popularity on casual dining menus. **Recipes** featuring these ingredients and more are featured on beefitswhatsfordinner.com.

Beef
Appears on
90%
of All Menus
in the U.S.

Menu Trends: Ingredients to Pair with Beef

- Greens
- Aioli
- Lime
- Croutons
- Balsamic

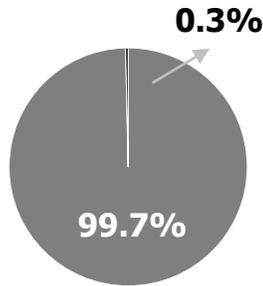
Source: Technomic, Ignite, National Food Trends, 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to The Beef Checkoff.

Meat Alternatives

Meat and beef **substitutes** represent a small percentage of the fresh meat and beef markets when considering dollars sold.

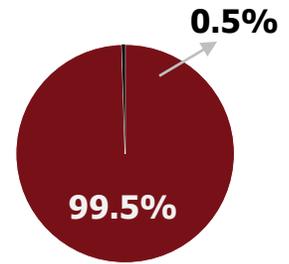
2025 Market Share (Dollars Sold)

Fresh Animal Protein vs. Substitutes



■ All Animal Proteins
■ AP Substitutes

Fresh Beef vs. Beef Substitutes



■ Beef
■ Beef Substitutes

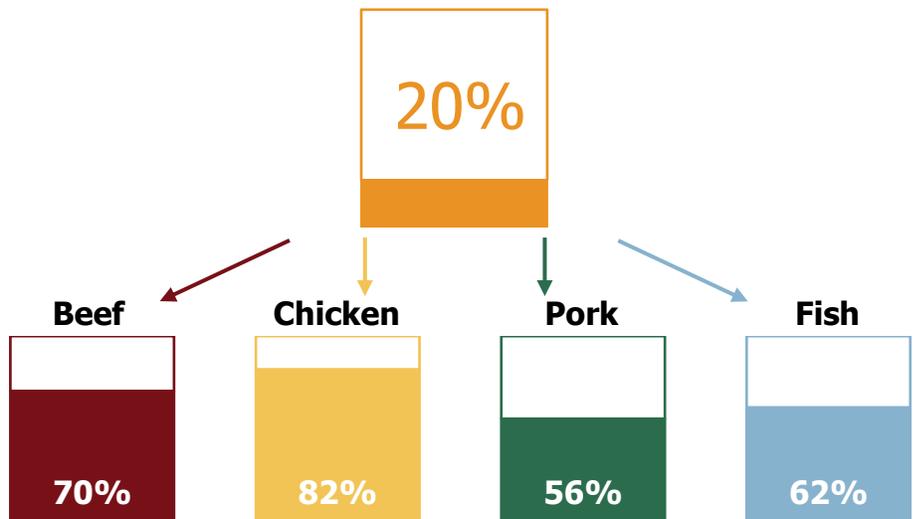
Source: Circana. 52 Weeks, Retail Protein Sales, ending 12/28/2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Note: Animal protein constitutes beef, bison, chicken, fowl, lamb, pork, turkey, and veal. Beef substitute forms include chubs, ground, and patties. Only fresh products were included in calculations.

Weekly+ Meat Consumption Among Meat Alternative Consumers

Weekly+ **consumption** of meat alternatives is **trending down** (11 percentage points since 2021).

Consumers who eat meat alternatives at least once per week **still frequently eat** a variety of other meat proteins, including **beef**.



Source: Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
Analysis: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

This report was compiled and analyzed by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), a contractor to the Beef Checkoff. To learn more, visit www.BeefResearch.org.