

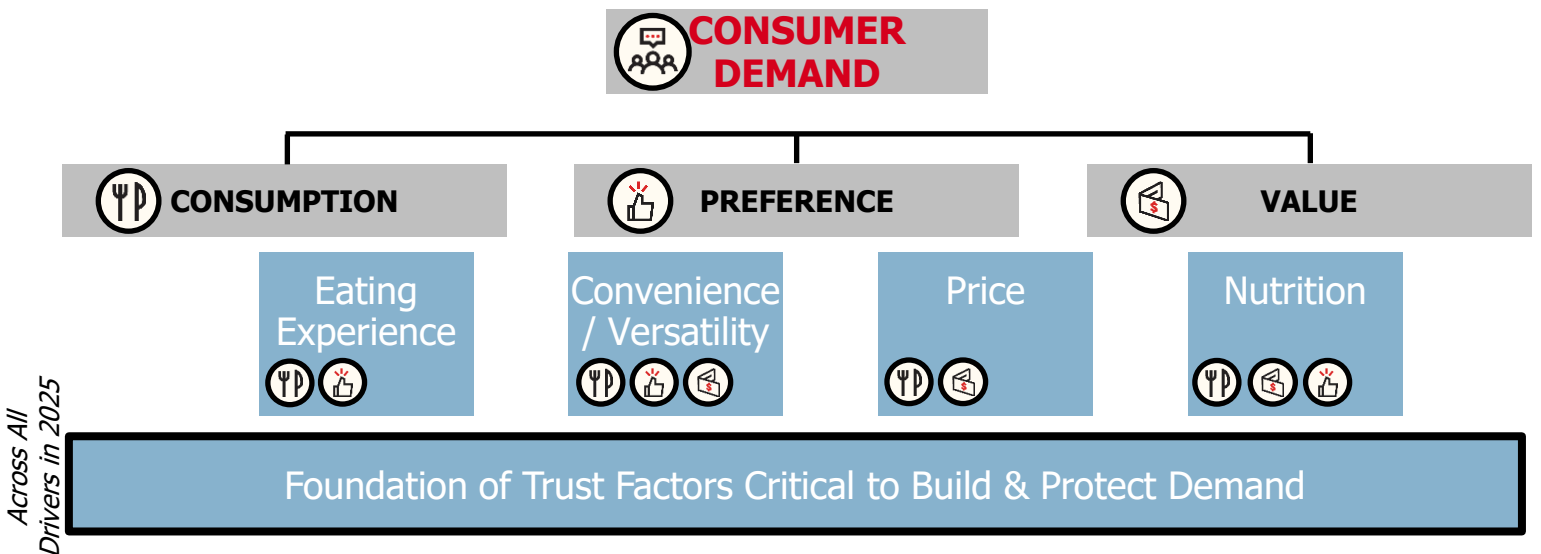
# Beef Industry Review and Consumer Insights: February 2026 Edition

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%**.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

# Beef Industry Review and Consumer Insights: February 2026 Edition

These behaviors align with the **Value and Versatility** demand driver and reinforce the importance of recipe resources like [www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com](http://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.