

Beef's Summer Grilling Outlook 2026

April 2026

As summer approaches, grilling takes center stage, and beef remains the protein many families reach for first. Even with higher food prices shaping decisions, grilling continues to be a go-to for many households, just with a more budget-aware mindset. Beef offers the right mix of familiarity, flavor, and flexibility, fitting everything from quick weeknight meals to weekend cookouts. This seasonal snapshot from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff, highlights how beef aligns with consumer needs and preferences throughout the summer.

Beef's Strong Summer Performance

Grilling remains a steady part of summer routines, giving households a simple way to cook, gather, and enjoy time outdoors. More than 60% of consumers say grilled food is among their favorite things to eat.¹ Beef continues to be a top choice when consumers fire up the grill. Nearly three-quarters of consumers say burgers are a must-have for grilling, and close to 60% say the same about steak.² Other popular beef items include hot dogs, brats, ribeye steaks, beef ribs, and sirloin.³ These choices reflect tradition and practicality. Burgers are simple, crowd-pleasing, and adaptable to a range of budgets, while steaks add a special touch to summer celebrations. Major summer holidays reinforce these patterns, with Memorial Day, Father's Day, July 4th, and Labor Day consistently delivering some of the strongest weekly beef sales of the year.⁴

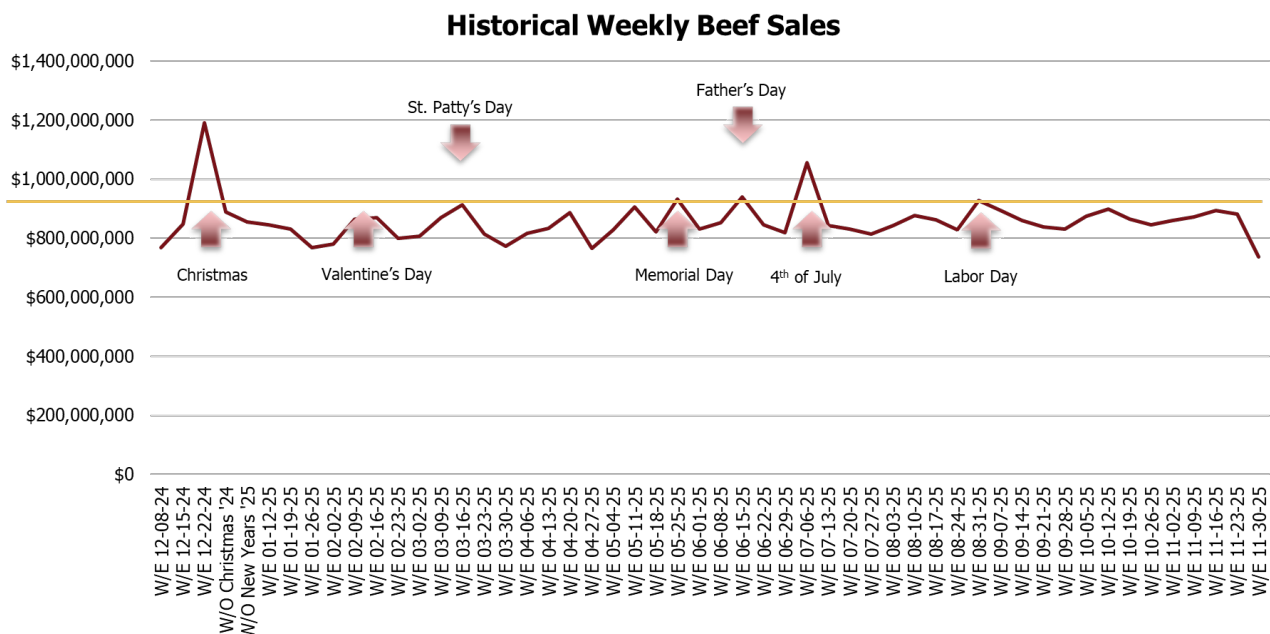


Figure 1. Historical Weekly Beef Sales

Source: Circana, Total US: Multi-Outlet+, data through 11/30/2025.

Analysis by National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Grilling shows up strongly in summer partly because it's something households rely on throughout the year. Across consumer segments, it ranks as the number-two cooking method for beef at home, giving people a familiar option when outdoor meals become more frequent.⁵ Many of the top beef dishes consumers enjoy – burgers, steaks, ribs, and brats – are especially well-suited to the grill, making it a natural fit for warm weather cooking.

Beyond the grill, consumers rely on a range of cooking methods at home. Skillet cooking is more popular among older generations, while Millennials and Gen X are more likely to grill.⁵ Stir-fry, air-fry, and smoking are notably more popular among younger generations, highlighting younger consumers’ interest in both convenience and different cooking techniques.⁵

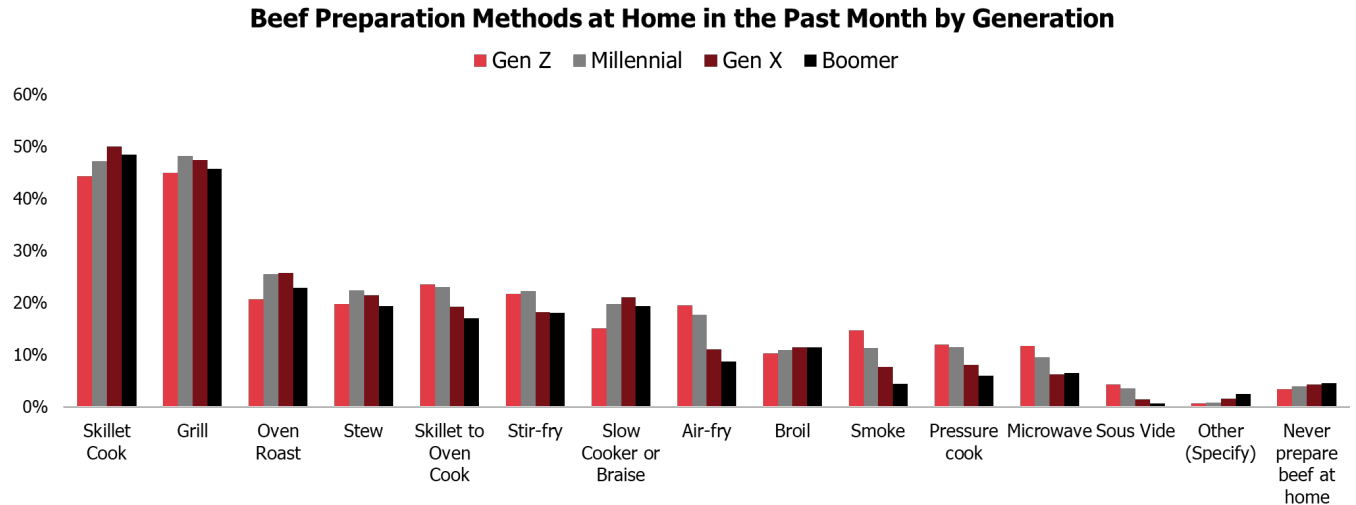


Figure 2. Beef Preparation Methods at Home in the Past Month by Generation

Source: Consumer Beef Tracker January – December 2025. BB11: “In which of the following ways have you prepared beef meals at home in the past month?”

Analysis: National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

Top Beef Cuts Driving Summer Sales

Across the major summer holidays, several key categories consistently anchor dollar sales and show notable year-over-year growth. Ground beef leads the way, reaching more than \$337 million in sales around Memorial Day and surpassing \$422 million during the week of July 4th, with double digit growth across all three holidays. Its adaptability and affordability make it a reliable summer staple. Steak also plays a significant role. Ribeye sees a strong lift around July 4th, reaching more than \$157 million in sales, with 18% growth versus last year. Ribs, brisket, and other slow-cook cuts also gain traction as consumers take advantage of longer weekends and outdoor cooking.⁶

Product	Dollar Sales					
	Week Ending 06-01-25		Week Ending 07-06-25		Week Ending 09-07-25	
	Current	% Change vs YA	Current	% Change vs YA	Current	% Change vs YA
BEEF	\$831,735,180	13.3%	\$1,056,705,812	13.5%	\$894,998,409	10.2%
GROUND BEEF	\$337,849,914	15.9%	\$422,398,475	14.4%	\$367,205,456	13.4%
BEEF LOIN	\$121,835,440	10.8%	\$151,232,317	11.3%	\$117,573,151	5.1%
BEEF RIBEYE	\$94,769,315	14.3%	\$157,564,102	18.0%	\$96,577,447	5.5%
BEEF CHUCK	\$57,550,784	15.8%	\$60,851,593	19.3%	\$75,866,935	10.6%
BEEF SIRLOIN	\$67,649,452	13.3%	\$80,054,137	12.9%	\$64,513,595	6.3%
BEEF ROUND	\$47,880,594	5.3%	\$49,470,911	0.0%	\$56,353,392	15.0%
BEEF INGREDIENT CUTS	\$41,263,654	9.0%	\$43,450,635	5.8%	\$50,375,763	8.8%
BEEF BRISKET	\$14,631,279	6.5%	\$32,319,721	18.8%	\$15,616,914	7.4%
BEEF RIBS	\$19,246,437	9.3%	\$26,010,556	11.6%	\$20,915,965	11.2%
BEEF OFFAL	\$7,987,074	0.9%	\$8,683,020	2.9%	\$9,085,570	2.7%
BEEF PLATE	\$9,618,625	25.3%	\$12,055,685	17.9%	\$9,150,795	16.3%
BEEF FLANK	\$7,564,621	-1.0%	\$8,646,761	6.4%	\$7,138,685	4.2%
AO BEEF	\$2,697,629	39.7%	\$2,814,806	28.9%	\$3,128,180	31.7%
BEEF SHANK	\$1,190,362	45.9%	\$1,153,092	46.5%	\$1,496,560	58.1%

Figure 3. Top Beef Cuts

Source: Circana, Total US: Multi-Outlet+, data through 09/07/2025.

Analysis by National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.

How Shoppers are Adapting

While summer brings strong demand, rising grocery costs continue to influence how households shop. Price remains one of the top considerations in protein decisions, and many consumers are looking for ways to stretch their budgets without sacrificing taste or quality.⁵ Households are also adjusting their routines – dining out less, prioritizing home-cooked meals, and adopting strategies like seeking deals, stocking up and freezing beef, choosing private-label options, and repurposing leftovers creatively.⁵

Even with tighter budgets, consumers keep beef in the weekly rotation by choosing cuts that offer value and versatility. Ground beef remains a dependable, budget-friendly option that works across countless meals. Steaks, while more premium, are purchased intentionally for special occasions – moments where consumers are willing to spend a bit more. Higher prices may also encourage shoppers to branch out and try new cuts, flavors, and cooking techniques. Instead of ribeye, consumers may consider sirloin, flat iron, hanger steak, or tri-tip for a similar experience at a lower price point.

Larger beef cuts at retail, driven in part by increases in cattle size, are shaping behavior as well. Shoppers are using these cuts for family-style meals and planning for leftovers that can be repurposed throughout the week. This approach supports budget-conscious planning and gives households more flexibility in how they portion and prepare meals.

In Summary

Summer remains a strong season for beef, supported by steady grilling habits, clear consumer preferences, and holiday weeks that reliably lift sales. As prices influence how households plan and shop, beef’s broad range of cuts, cooking methods, and meal applications keeps it well-positioned for the season. It satisfies budget-conscious shoppers while still capturing the excitement and tradition of summer grilling.

FOR BEEF GRILLING TIPS AND TRICKS, VISIT [BEEFITSWHATSFORDINNER.COM](https://beefitswhatsfordinner.com)

- [Grilling basics](#)
- [Grilling favorites](#)
- [Tastiest burgers](#)

Sources

1. Perdue. "Reasons for Grilling among Consumers in The United States in 2024." *Statista*, Statista Inc., 30 Jul 2024.
2. Perdue. "Must-have Foods for The Grill in The United States in 2024." *Statista*, Statista Inc., 30 Jul 2024.
3. Summer Grilling Survey Insights, May 2023. Survey conducted by National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff.
4. Circana, Total US: Multi-Outlet+, data through 11/30/2025.
5. Consumer Beef Tracker, January – December 2025.
6. Circana, Total US: Multi-Outlet+., data through 09/07/2025.