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U.S. Per Capita Availability of Chicken Surpasses That of Beef

by Jeanine Bentley



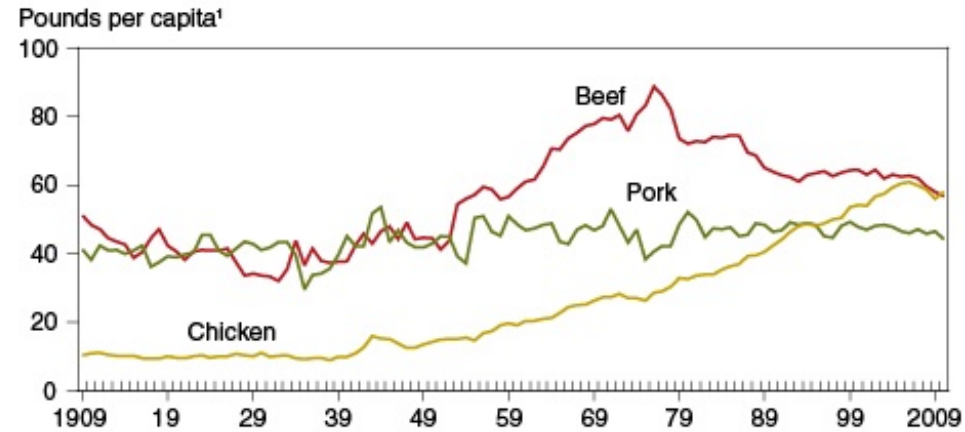
According to ERS's food availability data, the per capita supply of chicken in the United States exceeded that of beef for the first time in 2010. Fifty-eight pounds of chicken per person on a boneless, edible basis were available for Americans to eat in 2010, compared to 56.7 pounds of beef. Beef availability has been declining since peaking at 88.8 pounds per capita on a boneless, edible basis in 1976. Chicken began its upward climb in the 1940s, overtaking pork in 1996 as the second most consumed meat. Since 1970, U.S. chicken availability per person has more than doubled.

The rising per capita availability of chicken stems from many factors, including the increased convenience of chicken products, such as skinless, boneless breasts; breaded chicken nuggets; and pre-cooked, pre-seasoned, and ready-to-serve offerings, such as rotisserie chicken. Chicken's lower price relative to beef and pork may have also contributed to chicken's growing popularity. According to 2010 ERS price data, wholesale and retail prices for chicken, weighted to account for prices and amounts sold of whole chickens and parts, were \$1.67 and \$2.64 per pound lower, respectively, than beef prices and \$0.67 and \$1.36 per pound lower than pork prices.

Chicken's relatively lower price may, in part, reflect efficiencies in chicken production that have led to lower bird mortality rates and a higher average live weight per broiler--5.8 pounds today versus 3.4 pounds in 1960. Chicken consumption has also benefited from health-related concerns about fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. On a per-ounce basis, chicken has less total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than beef.

ERS's per capita food availability data, which is a popular proxy for food consumption, measures national supplies of several hundred foods, such as fresh apples, frozen spinach, and eggs. For this historical series, ERS annually calculates the available supply of each food, summing domestic production, beginning inventories, and imports and then subtracting exports, farm uses (feed and seed), ending inventories, and nonfood uses. Per capita estimates are calculated by dividing the total annual supply of a food by the U.S. population for that year. Although these estimates do not directly measure actual quantities eaten, they provide an indication of whether Americans, on average, are consuming more or less of various foods over time.

The amount of chicken available for U.S. consumption peaked in 2006 at 60.9 pounds per person



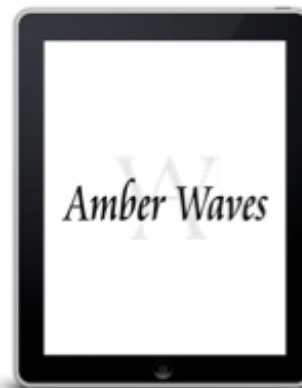
Note: Food availability data serve as proxies for food consumption.

¹Calculated on the basis of raw and edible meat in boneless, trimmed (edible) weight. Excludes edible offals, viscera, and game for red meat. Includes skin, neck, and giblets for chicken. Excludes use of chicken for commercially prepared pet food.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service.

This article is drawn from...

[Food Availability \(Per Capita\) Data System](#), by Jeanine Bentley and Jean Buzby, USDA, Economic Research Service, November 2012



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