

Meat Consumption Trends in the United States

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Abstract – In the U.S. the amount of beef consumed has declined from peak consumption in the 1970s and has continued to decline. Pork consumption has remained rather stable and chicken consumption has been on a nearly steady rise. Ground beef prices (which parallel other beef prices) have increased steadily since early 2000s and the increase has become steeper starting towards the end of the decade.

Key Words – meat consumption, beef prices, consumer preference, trends, nutrition

Introduction

The changes in beef, pork and chicken consumption over time are depicted in Figure 1. The graph shows a decline in per capita beef consumption since its peak in 1976. Per capita pork consumption has been reasonably steady over the last 50 years and that of chicken has increased during this time. As of 2015, per capita consumption of chicken, beef and pork was 90, 54 and 50 pounds respectively.

Factors Influencing Changes in Meat Consumption

Several factors account for the trends observed in meat consumption.

1. Cost/serving of beef has increased in the last 20 years from \$1.37 per lb. in 1995 to \$4.17 per lb. in 2015. When expressed in 2016 dollars, the price has doubled during the same period (Figure 2).
2. Health concerns have played an important role in the changing consumer preferences
 - a. Consumers are attempting to reduce their calorie intake from meat by switching to poultry
 - b. Various studies have suggested (may or may not have been proven) links between saturated fat found in red meat and heart disease
3. Food safety, ingredients (animal parts, salt and nitrite and hormones) used in processed

meats, meat recalls etc. also impact public opinion

4. Environmental and ethical concerns regarding use of growth promoters and hormones, sustainability, pollution and animal cruelty
5. Demographic changes in the ethnic population in the U.S. This has increased consumption of lamb/mutton (< 1 lb. per capita) and goat.
6. Increasing number of vegetarians and vegans (about 3.2% of U.S. population) for ethical, religious or other reasons in the U.S.

In addition, per capita consumption of turkey (often seasonal) and fish increased between 1960 and 1990 and have held steady since (Figure 3). But in spite of this total meat consumption is slightly higher than it was in 1960.

Conclusion

Consumption of beef has declined, that of pork has remained fairly stable and that of chicken has increased dramatically since 1960. Price of ground beef (as an indicator of other beef items) has increased significantly in recent years which has impacted consumption. Shifting consumer tastes to other competing animal protein products is also a factor.

References

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Figure 1. Consumption of Beef, Pork and Chicken, 1965-2015

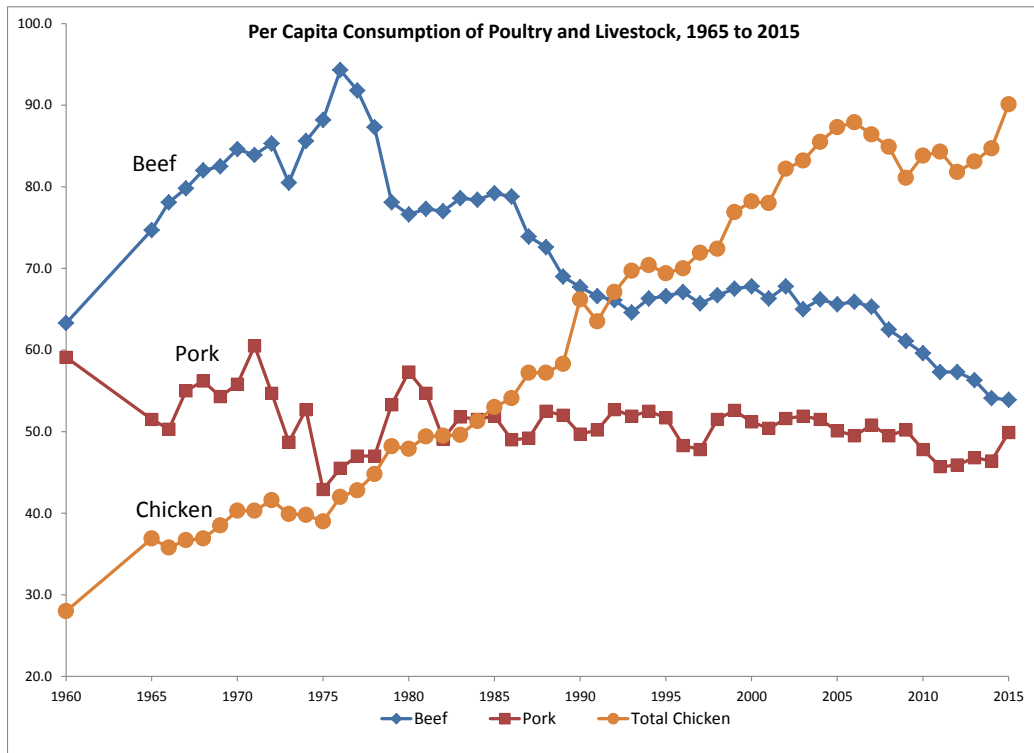


Figure 2. Price of Ground Beef

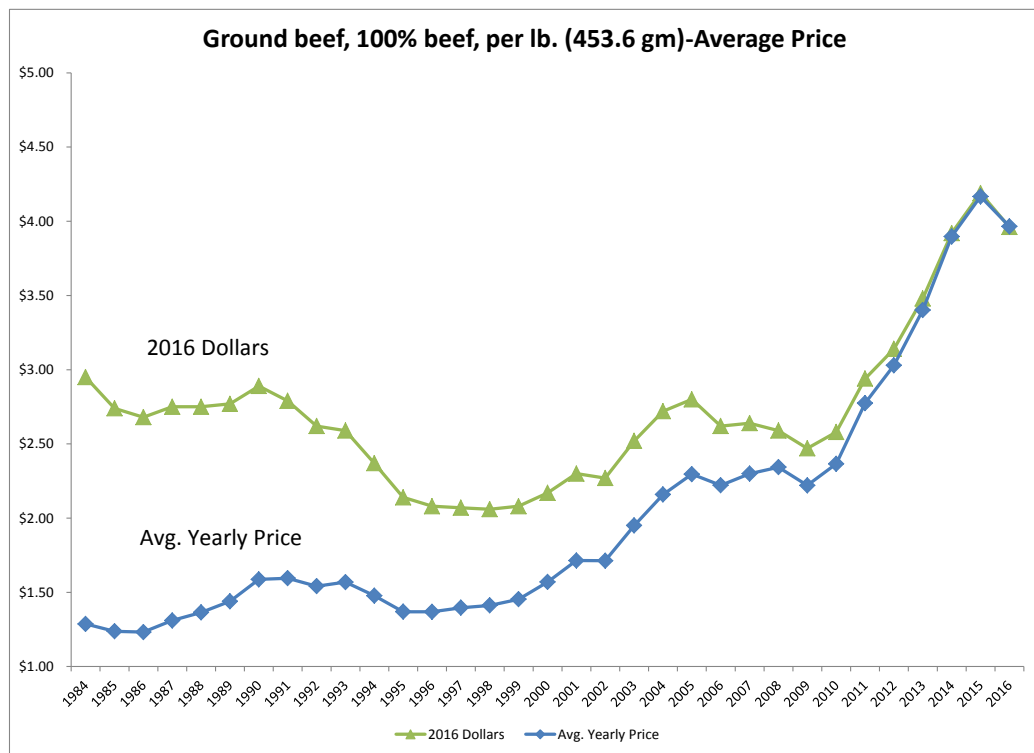


Figure 3. Turkey and Fish consumption

