

Cheese Consumption Continues To Rise

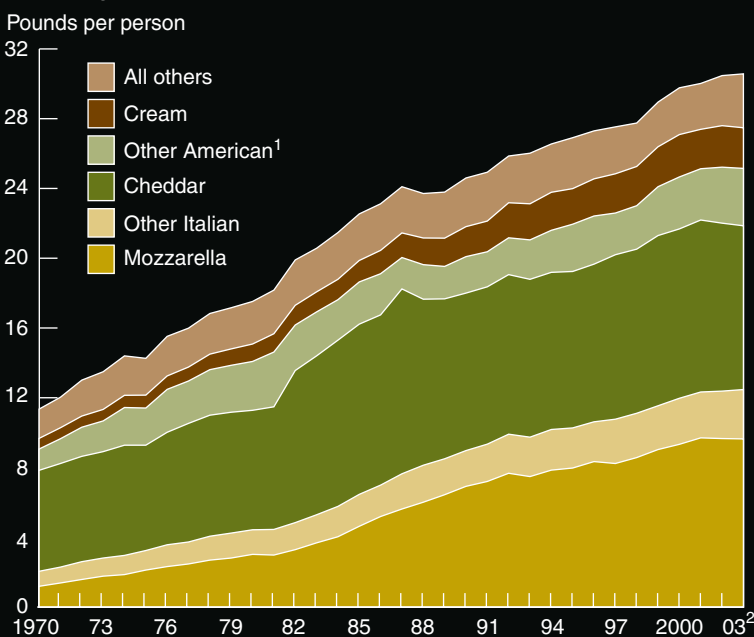
Demand for easy, time-saving strategies and cheese's utility in adding rich flavor to quick-serve meals (like soups, salads, pastas, sandwiches, cooked vegetables, eggs, and countless other dishes) are driving the rise in cheese consumption since 1970. The boom in eating out and ordering in parallels cheese's use as a major ingredient in food manufacturing (roughly 60 percent of our cheese now comes through these channels). For at-home consumption, resealable bags of shredded cheeses—including cheese blends tailored for use in Italian and Mexican recipes—and individually wrapped cheese sticks and baby Goudas have made cheese even more of a household staple.

Average U.S. cheese consumption nearly tripled between 1970 and 2003, from 11 pounds per person to 31 pounds. In 2000 (the latest year for which nutrient data are available), cheese contributed 26 percent of the calcium in the U.S. diet (up from 11 percent in 1970), 12 percent of the saturated fat (up from 5 percent in 1970), and 16 percent of the sodium (up from 6 percent in 1970).



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Americans now consume almost three times more cheese than they did in 1970



Note: Excludes full-skim American and cottage, pot, and baker's cheese.

¹American cheese, other than Cheddar, includes Colby, Monterey Jack, and washed or stirred curd.

²Preliminary estimates.

Mozzarella—the main cheese in pizza—overtook Cheddar in 2002 to become America's favorite cheese. In 2003, Mozzarella consumption reached 9.6 pounds per person, more than 8 times the 1970 level. From 1970 to 2003, consumption of Cheddar cheese increased 62 percent to 9.4 pounds per capita, making it America's second favorite cheese. Cream cheese overtook Swiss in the late 1980s—in part due to an explosion in the popularity of bagels—to become America's third favorite cheese, at 2.3 pounds consumed per person in 2003 (nearly 4 times the 1970 level).

Will U.S. per capita cheese consumption continue growing as it has since 1970? Projections by ERS and others say that the rate may well slow, mostly because of the aging of the population—the elderly generally eat out less frequently and eat less pizza and cheeseburgers. Likely to continue increasing, however, are the diversity, quality, and availability of cheeses in both supermarkets and specialty shops dedicated to artisanal and farmhouse cheeses. *W*

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For more information, visit www.ers.usda.gov/data/foodconsumption/

ERS annually calculates the amount of cheese and several hundred other foods available for consumption in the U.S. This series provides data back to 1909 for many commodities and is the only continuous source of data on food and nutrient availability in the U.S.

Prices Dominate Interstate Variation in WIC Food Costs

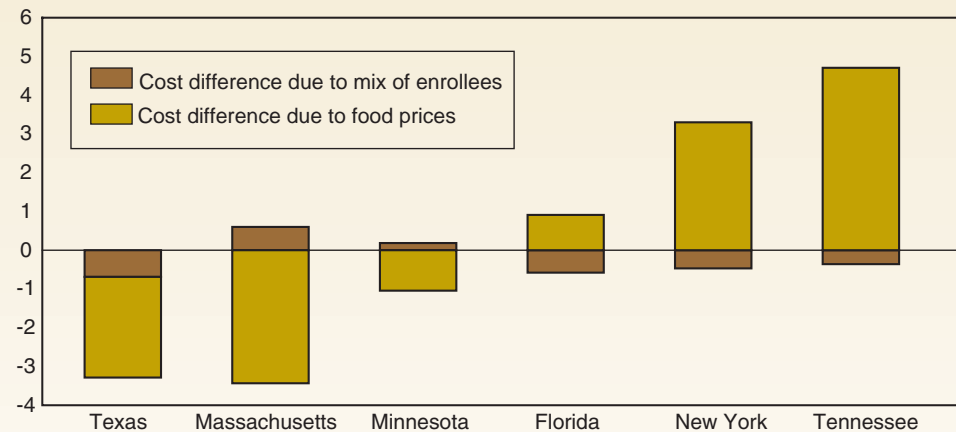
The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutrition education, referrals to health care and other social services, and foods to supplement the diets of low-income pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children up to age 5. WIC is the third largest Federal nutrition assistance program, trailing only the Food Stamp and the National School Lunch Programs.

WIC, which operates through a Federal/State/local partnership, is not an entitlement program. The number of participants that can be served each year depends on the annual appropriation and the cost of operating the program. Because food costs account for about 75 percent of total program expenditures, enacting policies to contain food costs allows States to reduce program expenditures. Understanding what drives WIC food costs helps States implement effective cost-reducing policies. A recent 17-State study by ERS found that variations in food prices between States usually play a much larger role than the different mix of participants, and that identical policies can affect costs differently across States.

The estimated average monthly food cost ranged from \$28.64 per WIC participant in Texas to \$36.27 in Tennessee; the average was \$31.92 across all 17 surveyed States. Within a State, each group of WIC enrollees (women, infants, or children) qualifies for a different food package, containing different types and/or quantities of foods. These food packages differ in cost, so variation in overall food costs can arise as the mix of enrollees differs across States. Enrollees receive monthly vouchers for the items in their food package, which they exchange at approved WIC retailers. Retailers submit the vouchers to the WIC State agency for reimbursement at the retail price for the WIC items. So, variation in overall WIC food costs can also arise due to differences in retail prices for WIC items across States. For example, retail price differences accounted for WIC food benefits in Tennessee being an estimated \$4.71 higher than the average for the States studied.

Food price differences have a larger effect on WIC food costs than enrollee mix

Difference between a State's WIC food costs and the average cost for all States studied (dollars)



Note: State data come from metro areas within a State, not from a statewide sample. The 17-State average cost equals \$31.92 per month.

States frequently enact policies meant to reduce food costs, such as requiring participants to purchase only gallon containers of milk. Variation in WIC food costs may also result from differences in States' cost-containment policies. But, even savings from identical cost-containment practices differ across States. \mathbb{W}

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Interstate Variation in WIC Food Package Costs: The Role of Food Prices, Caseload Composition, and Cost-Containment Practices, by David E. Davis and Ephraim S. Leibtag, FANRR-41, USDA/ERS, January 2005, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr41/

