

Food Consumption, Prices, and Expenditures, 1970-97

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Introduction

This bulletin revises and updates through 1997 (1998, where available) the data published in *Food Consumption, Prices, and Expenditures, 1970-95*, SB-939, issued in August 1997. It presents historical data on per capita consumption of major food commodities in the United States, including the basic data on supplies and disposition from which the consumption estimates are derived. In addition, information concerning population, income, prices, and expenditures related to food consumption has been assembled to provide a comprehensive and convenient source of data for statistical and economic analysis of food consumption.

The System for Measuring Food Consumption

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (USDA, ERS) annually calculates the amount of food available for human consumption in the United States. The U.S. food supply historical series measures national aggregate consumption of several hundred foods. It is the only source of time-series data on food and nutrient availability in the country.

The food supply series is based on records of commodity flows from production to end uses (fig. 1). This involves the development of supply and utilization balance sheets for each major commodity from which human foods are produced (tables 44-93). Total available supply is the sum of production, beginning inventories, and imports. These three components are either directly measurable or estimated by government agencies using sampling and statistical methods. Production is often measured at the farm level; for some products, however, production is measured at the first level of processing.

For most commodity categories, measurable uses are exports, industrial uses, farm inputs (seed and feed), and end-of-year inventories. Human food use normally is not directly measured or statistically estimated. Rather, the amount of food available for human use is calculated as the difference between available commodity supplies (the sum of production, beginning inventories, and imports) and nonfood use (exports, farm use, and industrial consumption) (fig. 1). In a few cases, supplies for human food use are measured directly and one of the other use components becomes the residual. This is the case for wheat, in which flour production is measurable and livestock feed use becomes the residual.

The availability of food for human use, which normally is the residual of the commodity supply-utilization table, represents disappearance of food into the marketing system. Hence, it is often referred to as food disappearance. Per capita food consumption usually is calculated by dividing annual total food

disappearance by the U.S. total population, including the Armed Forces overseas, on July 1.

Estimates of consumption (disappearance) for many commodities are prepared at two levels: the primary weight and the retail-equivalent weight. The basic measurement is at the primary distribution level, which is dictated for each commodity by the structure of the marketing system and the availability of data. For some, measurement is at the farmgate. For most commodities that are processed, measurement is at the processing or manufacturing plant. Once the primary level of distribution has been selected, quantities of all other components in the balance sheet for that commodity are converted to the primary-weight basis, using appropriate conversion factors. For example, the primary distribution level for red meat is the slaughter plant, so all quantities are converted to carcass weight. Nearly all supply and utilization

tables show per capita consumption on a primary-weight basis.

In some per capita food consumption tables (tables 1-41), ERS converts food consumption from primary weight to a retail-weight equivalent, using conversion factors that allow for subsequent processing, trimming, shrinkage, or loss in the distribution system. Fresh beef, for example, loses 30 percent of its weight from carcass to retail cuts (table 3).

For some uses, a more desirable basis of computation is boneless weight. ERS has calculated per capita consumption of red meat, poultry, and fish on that basis to facilitate comparisons (table 6). The boneless-weight measure excludes all bones, but includes the separable fat normally sold on retail cuts of red meat.