

## Webinar Transcript:

### Data Training Webinar: Food Dollar

April 30, 2026

**Ashley:** Hello, and good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ashley, your host for today's data training webinar. On behalf of USDA's Economic Research Service, welcome and thank you for joining us. Today's session will provide an overview of the updated food dollar data product, highlight its many uses, and include a demonstration on how to access and explore the data series. Before we begin, though, let me quickly note that this webinar is being recorded and will post to the ERS website. If you have any questions during the presentation, please submit them using the Q&A feature at the bottom of your screen, and we'll try to answer a few after the presentation. If we don't get to yours today, please email us. We'd be happy to follow up. Now, it's my pleasure to introduce our speakers today, ERS Economists Quinton Baker and James Chandler Zachary from our Food Economics Division. Thank you both for being here. I'll turn it over to you now.

**Quinton:** Great, thank you for the introduction, Ashley. My name is Quinton Baker, and it's our pleasure to talk to you about the Food Dollar today. So, did you know that U.S. farms received 11.8 cents of every dollar spent on all domestically produced food in 2024? Well, total spending on domestically produced food in 2024 was \$2.17 trillion and domestic farm establishments received over \$250 billion for the sale of farm commodities that were used to support the food system. These are just some of the many facts that you can get from the Economic Research Service's Food Dollar data product.

So, in our webinar today, we will discuss the motivation and development of the Food Dollar data product as well as define the Food Dollar and key concepts that are helpful to know. We'll demonstrate how to find and use the data, and at last, we will answer questions at the end.

So why develop the Food Dollar? Well, in 1946, Congress passed the Agricultural Marketing Act, which required USDA to determine the cost of marketing agricultural products in their various forms and to various channels. And since then, about 80 years ago, the USDA has done that in various forms, including special reports based on data availability and the methods have changed quite a bit over time. But since 2011, the Economic Research Service has published The Food Dollar. And in 2026, this year, we comprehensively updated the Food Dollar to have even more detail about the costs of marketing agricultural products and the food system as a whole. So, it's... aside from...the congressional mandate, there's also broad interest in the cost of producing food and how the costs are distributed across the supply chain.

One reason why is that food is a relatively large share of consumer spending. It's usually the third largest spending item after housing and transportation. And in 2023, food accounted for about 13% of U.S. household spending.

So, what is the food dollar? The food dollar offers various perspectives on the costs of producing and distributing food. For a particular food category, we'll get into those in a moment, users can examine the cost structure of producing and distributing a food item, compare the cost for different food items, compare the cost for the same food item over time, and examine the roles of imports in the domestic food system.

So, broadly, that's what the Food Dollar was. More specifically, the Food Dollar measures the value of food production along domestic supply chains for dozens of detailed food categories. Examples of these...accounts of food that we track are bakery products at home, fresh vegetables at home, fresh fruits at home, food at limited-service restaurants, and alcohol at full-service restaurants. The measures of value are reported in both millions of dollars and cents per food dollar.

So, what is a food dollar? Food dollar is a representative dollar spent by a person residing in the United States on domestically produced food. So, we're aggregating up to the national level for all spending in one year on a particular category. So, the bill shown here on the slide is for all food, which is food at home and food away from home. Combined, we could also do something more specific, like the bakery products, but a food dollar is just a single dollar that represents all the spending on domestically produced food.

So how is the Food Dollar used? Well, we use bills to describe the value distribution of a food dollar under different supply chain concepts. So, there's actually a double meaning to the word bill here. So one is that it's the U.S. dollar bill that we use as a background when we make charts of these. And then it's also, you can think of it as an itemized bill, which is just a way of showing you, here's your cost per dollar of food purchased. Here's the cost breakdown. There's the marketing bill, the industry group bill, and the primary factor bill, and we'll get a little bit of detail about those right now.

So, the marketing bill splits the food dollar into the farm share and the marketing share. The farm share measures the gross returns to farm establishments for the sale of farm commodities linked to consumer food spending. The marketing share is the remainder of the food dollar that includes all of the costs of getting commodities from the farm, processing, distributing, and selling to the final point of sale to the consumer, wherever they may be, whether it's a restaurant, a grocery store, any place you can buy food.

The industry group bill measures value added by 13 different industry groups that participate in the domestic food supply chain. Value added is created when industries

transform inputs into outputs, such as a food processor. They'll purchase farm commodities and then sell processed food at a higher price than what they paid for the farm commodities. New for 2026, in the industry group bill, farms are captured by 3 different industry groups: crops; livestock; forestry, fishing, and agricultural services.

Some detail that we can get from the industry group bill is that we can examine how the value-added changes year over year by different industries, as industries will face different conditions on a year-to-year basis. For example, in 2024, value added by the livestock industry group increased by 12.1% relative to 2023.

Lastly, we have the primary factor bill, which measures payments for labor, capital, output taxes, and imported inputs. We'll get a little bit more into imported inputs in a moment. But it's the primary factor bill that tells us that in 2024, workers in the food system received \$1.17 trillion for their labor, which amounts to 54.1 cents per food dollar. So now I'm going to hand it to my colleague, Chandler Zachary, who will get a little bit more into the remaining detail in the Food Dollar, as well as talk about some of our source data. Take it away, Chandler.

**Chandler:** Thanks, Quinton, and thanks, everyone, for being here. So, Quinton introduced you to the primary factor bill and the industry group bill, and one very interesting thing that we can do with the food dollar is show how primary factors break out across industry groups. So, what you see on this graphic is, on the horizontal, we have the food outlet, food at home, food away from home, and all food, and the different primary factors, salary and benefits, and property income, and so on. And we're able to show, for a given food outlet, what value is attributable to the industry group, the primary factor for a specific industry group in that outlet. As an example, in 2024, food services, excuse me, salary and benefits claimed 44.2 cents of every food away from home dollar in the food services industry group. And these, because all food is a weighted average of food at home and food away from home, that means that the share of food services labor in all food was 25.9 cents per dollar.

The data coverage in the 2026 Food Dollar Update expands the amount of detail in food spending and food demand to 41 detailed accounts. For example, we have accounts for cereals at home, beef at home, processed dairy products at home. And we also have accounts for food away from home, alcohol at home, and alcohol away from home. And these measure total spending. For example, fresh fruits and fresh vegetables measures total spending on things like lettuces and green beans, and also apples that you buy at the grocery store. They do not necessarily measure the value of fresh fruits and vegetables in other spending categories, like...fresh-cut, grab-and-go fruits. We also have 6 aggregated accounts for, all food at home, all food away from home, and then also all alcohol and all

food. And, we're also able to show the total spending across domestic and imported food dollars. And it's a... it's... I want to emphasize that we have this detail across all three bills, so you can see this breakout for the marketing bill, the industry group bill, and the primary factor bill.

We measure two types of imports in the Food Dollar. One type is imported inputs, and these are ingredients and materials and equipment imported from other countries that are used in domestic food production. And these are things such as cookware imported from France, or cranberries imported from Canada, used in domestic juice production. We also measure imported food dollars, or the retail value of finished food products imported for consumption from other countries. And in 2024, domestic food production made up about 84% of food consumption, and imported food production, imported food dollars, made up about 16%. And of the domestic food production, 5% was from imported inputs, and 79% was from domestic value added.

All of this detail is possible because of the Agri-Food Economic Data System, which is the new data model that underlies the Food Dollar. We call it Ag-FEDS, and Ag-FEDS assembles data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis' full suite of input-output tables, as well as information from the industry economic accounts, personal consumption expenditures, and their benchmark and annual summary detail. The benchmark detail is only available during every economic census year. Those are years ending in 2 and 7, and that detail is expanded to the, to the annual level so that we can produce this level of detail on an annual basis. We also integrate data from the Economic Research Service, namely the Food Expenditure Series, and Price Spreads from Farm to Consumer, and Meat Price Spreads. And this means that the spending data that's in Ag-FEDS and in the Food Dollar matches the food expenditure series dollar for dollar. And the price spreads are also used to calibrate farm shares so that we can redirect commodities, food commodities, and final spending back to their sources in the national accounts.

The Food Dollar multiplier model is derived from about 360 commodities in Ag-FEDS and their production flows. The previous model had only about 150 commodities in the 2023 Food Dollar that was published in 2024. And so, we've more than doubled the amount of detail, the amount of commodity detail in the underlying data. And Ag-FEDS models the whole economy, but it puts a special focus on the domestic food system. Back to you, Quinton.

**Quinton:** Great, thank you, Chandler. So now I'm going to give an overview of the Food Dollar webpages, as well as provide an example of how to work with the Food Dollar data. So at [ers.usda.gov](https://ers.usda.gov), you'll see the header across all the pages on the website. The ways that you can find the Food Dollar from the ERS website is to navigate through the data tab and

find us in food-related topics. This is a fantastic way to stumble upon other fantastic data products that we have available from the Economic Research Service. Alternatively, you can use the search bar, and type in food dollar and it should take you right there.

Within the Food Dollar webpages, you'll see a navigation bar on the left that describes the pages that are available within Food Dollar. The main landing page is the overview page, which provides a brief synopsis of the Food Dollar, and this is also where you'll find the downloadable data files for the Food Dollar. New for 2026, we've added a 'summary findings' where we discuss and provide charts on the most recent findings for the most recently published Food Dollar update. So, this March, we published the 2024 Food Dollar, and have lots of detail about our findings there, available on our summary findings page.

We also provide documentation, which will talk about data coverage, our methods, other resources that you may be interested in, as well as how the Food Dollar incorporates and fits in with other related data. And because the Food Dollar uses some specialized terminology, we've included a glossary within our users' guide. And currently, within the Food Dollar page, you can have access to the documentation for Ag-FEDS, or the Agri-Food Economic Data System that Chandler described just a moment ago. And there's also the downloadable Ag-FEDS data files can be found there, too.

Lastly, because we strive for continuous improvement and transparency with our stakeholders, which is you, the listener right now, and the listener on the recorded version of this as well, we log our revisions and mention with our update and revision history anything that will be relevant for comparing the sets of numbers from one year to the next.

Great. So, downloading the data. The downloadable data for the food dollars is available in the overview page. The URL and a QR code that will take you to that URL is available at the bottom of this page. And then we have a screenshot of what the download section looks like on the slide as well. So, the current Food Dollar data are available in Excel format, as well as a machine-readable CSV that comes packaged in a zip folder with a codebook. We also have available archive data from previously published results from the 2011 Food Dollar model, which includes our last release using that model, which was published in 2024.

We're focusing on the Excel document for now. It has 4 tabs on it. The first tab is the README tab, which gives all the metadata about the particular release that you're looking at with the file. We have the data available in 3 different views on different sheets. I'm gonna give a little bit of detail about all of them. But I do want to iterate, it's the same data, just depending on what you're using the Food Dollar for, some formats are... might be a little bit easier to work with for you. We also have the data dictionary that gives a

description of the contents of each column. This will be really helpful if you're trying to filter down to examine one particular part of the food system. So, as we said, we have 47 accounts of food. We have a couple decades of data. And we have different units available. There ends up being a lot of data here, so getting familiar with the columns and the filters can be really helpful.

So, we'll talk about data by factor first. This is the legacy Food Dollar format. It's also the one described in our technical bulletin that describes how the Food Dollar data gets put together. Where the main thing about this is that the break out by primary factor, which is the salary and benefits, property income, output taxes, and imported inputs, are all going to be in line with the total. So one row is gonna have the distribution of the value added by primary factor, as well as the total for that line.

Data is the long form, also known as linearized format. It's probably the most flexible format for most purposes but will require a little bit more filtering to get down to what you need. We'll be giving an example on this in just a moment. And lastly, we have data by year, which makes annual comparisons easy. So, on the right side here, you'll see the same data for a series available for 2024, 2023, and it goes on to our earliest year, currently in the data, which is 2007. This is really handy if you're trying to track one specific metric in the Food Dollar over time.

So now we'll do an example for XF1109 processed dairy products where we want to look at the industry group bill in cents per food dollar for 2024. So, the idea is that we want to get the relevant data to make this chart shown here on the slide.

So, in the long-form data, we can use filters for year, channel, account name, concept and unit to get to the data we desire.

A little bit more detail on the filters. So, for the concept filter, you'd be clicking on the arrow to the right of the word concept in that column. And then from there, this is where you would select industry group bill, or marketing bill, total spending, whatever you want to look at. In our example, we are interested in the industry group bill. And then, because we have 47 accounts to choose from and it can be somewhat confusing, perhaps at first, to know if we're saying bakery products, do we mean, like, food at home bakery products? The answer is yes, that's what we mean in that case. You can use a channel filter to see what's available by channel. So, we're interested in the processed dairy products for food at home, and as Chandler pointed out before, when we're talking about the values of processed dairy products, this is the value for processed dairy products sold as butter, or yogurt, or cheese at the grocery store, not the value of, like, the cheese that's included on a frozen pizza, or perhaps used by restaurants, when they're making pizza, or whatever else they

may be using cheese for. So, you can filter down to food away... sorry, to food at home, using the channel filter, and then you can use the account name filter to find and select processed dairy products. Alternatively, you can search for processed dairy products using the search box in the drop-down arrow for account name and get to that point, too. And I mentioned, previously that XF1109 is the account number for processed dairy products, and as you become more familiar with the Food Dollar, or if you're using this in a software, it's probably easier to match on that account number than it is to make sure you're, you know, getting the right casing for processed dairy products. So if you just submit all those filters, you'll get a view of the data like this. And you'd 'butter' believe it, but that's all it is to get down to the data you want to look at.

So, some additional resources before we take your questions. Chandler and I released a report: the *A More Detailed Food Dollar: Enhanced Accounting of U.S. Food Costs* that's available on the ERS website. The link and the QR code are available here. You can also find it on the Food Dollar website. The Food Dollar website is going to be the place to find the most current information available on the Food Dollar, and everything that we discussed. There'll be links and more information there. Lastly, you can ask the researchers questions anytime, including right now, because we've reached the Q&A portion of the webinar. Thank you.

**Ashley:** Wonderful! Thank you, Quinton and Chandler! We'll go ahead and take some questions from the Q&A box now. Just a reminder, if we're unable to get to your question today, please email us at [ers.press@usda.gov](mailto:ers.press@usda.gov), and we'd be glad to follow up with you. But for our first question: why does the Food Dollar measure returns to both in... I'm sorry, why does the Food Dollar measure returns to farms in both the marketing bill and the industry bill?

**Quinton:** Sure, thank you for the question. So, the...there's two different ways that the farm returns are being measured. The farm share is more in line, from the marketing bill, it's more in line with the original congressional mandate to regularly inform Congress on the cost of marketing agricultural products. And that's measuring the gross returns, so that's just the ratio of the farm commodities, received, like, the total receipts for it, as a percentage of the total domestic food system. And then the industry group bill does things a little bit differently, where it just looks at the value added, where we're subtracting off the costs that farms pay to other industry groups, and for any other inputs, for that matter, that don't come from other farms. So that would mean that the industry group bill does not include energy used on farms. It doesn't include the cost for seeds that will come from agribusiness and things of that nature. Chandler, do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

**Chandler:** No, you summed it up pretty well. Thanks, Quinton.

**Ashley:** Great, thank you. For our next question, I believe this one's for Chandler, what does it mean that the Food Dollar data are reconciled to food expenditure series and price spreads?

**Chandler:** Sure, thanks, Ashley. The purpose of Ag-FEDS and of the Food Dollar... Ag-FEDS, remember, is the Agri-food Economic Data System that underlies the Food Dollar. The purpose of these two data sets is to measure the value of economic activity that supports the domestic food system. And the BEA GDP accounting practices and nationally aggregated data obscure some of that value, and so we're able to recover spending, food spending data, from the food expenditure series. And we actually match, in the Food Dollar and in Ag-FEDS, we match food spending for food at home and food away from home, from the FES data, dollar for dollar. And then we're able to use the price spreads data and the meat price spreads data to actually calibrate how the value of food spending is returned to the original source commodities in the national accounts. That's what we mean by that. And if you want to know any more about that, of course, you can refer to our ERR and, to the, the Ag-FEDS' technical bulletin documentation for ag... for the Agri-Food Economic Data System – *A More Complete Accounting of the U.S. Agri-Food Economy*.

And the ERR that Quinton is showing you is for the Food Dollar – *A More Detailed Food Dollar: Enhanced Accounting of U.S. Food Costs*.

**Ashley:** Thanks. Alright, let's see here. Next question. Is the Food Dollar data only at the national level, or is there data also available at smaller geographies, such as by region or state?

**Quinton:** Yeah, so the Food Dollar is at the national level using these nationally aggregated accounts from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and also within ERS, so that is the level of detail that we're working with.

**Ashley:** Okay, next question, when will the 2025 data be released?

**Quinton:** Great. So, the...on the downloading the data part of the overview page for the Food Dollar, it'll highlight the next update date, which is November 17th, 2026. We typically publish the Food Dollar in November, which is not long after our source data becomes available to build up Ag-FEDS, and then the Food Dollar. So this November will be when we release the 2025 Food Dollar, and it'll also be the time where we revise, like, the 2024 Food Dollar and going backward, because the statistics that we work with for the Food Dollar get revisions from year to year depending on the various methodologies from our source data changing.

**Ashley:** Thanks. Next up, can you explain a bit more about what imported inputs are counted, and how?

**Quinton:** Sure, I'll hand this question to my colleague, Chandler Zachary, and pull up his slide where he had the definitions here.

**Chandler:** Thanks, Quinton. We capture the value of imported inputs in the national accounting data, the national, yes, the national accounting data, and those actually come into, into data, into our data as an imports category and final spending. Or, excuse me, in final demand. And so, we're able to use that information along with the input-output tables to measure the value of imported inputs used by different industry groups.

**Ashley:** Thanks! Alright... Let's see, next question, the Food Dollar data says nominal. Is there an inflation-adjusted version of the data?

**Quinton:** That's right, so the Food Dollar data that's available right now is nominal. As recently as last year, and currently under the archived version of our data on our website, there was a real Food Dollar that was released. This was a comprehensive, major revision to the Food Dollar, and in this revision, we only have the nominal version available at the moment. You can stay tuned on our website for any updates on that front. We would have to publish the constant price version of Ag-FEDS for then. But for now, we have the available data for 47 accounts, available in current year dollars.

**Ashley:** Thanks, Quinton. I think this next one is for Chandler. It asks, how does Ag-FEDS relate to... or can you explain again how Ag-FEDS relates to the Food Dollar?

**Chandler:** Sure, Ag-FEDS is assembled from national accounts data. And it shows how commodities are produced and used by different industries in their production to meet...to satisfy production and to satisfy final demand. And that model of the economy is used as an input to the Food Dollar multiplier model, which then shows for a given amount of food demand, which we take to be all food demand in a given year, how the value of the different production, industry production, is assigned in meeting that food demand. For example, how food processing, value is assigned in meeting, is attributed, excuse me, in meeting that... in that food demand.

**Ashley:** Thank you. Next up, how do you define farms in the Food Dollar?

**Quinton:** Yeah, so... for farms, there's definitions that we use from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which are consistent with the North American Industrial Classification System. I believe their source is, slightly different. I'll let Chandler chime in if he needs to, but...when we measure the farm share, one thing that we want to point out here is that we're measuring the value of farm commodities, which the vast majority of them do come from

things that are identified in the national accounts as farms, but there's also industries whose secondary production is going to be crops or livestock to a lesser extent, or these other agricultural activities that are considered farm products from the perspective of the Food Dollar. Chandler, is there anything you'd like to add?

**Chandler:** Yeah, sure, so, the Economic Census that BEA bases their national accounting data on does not include agriculture. That's measured in the, the Agricultural Census that's taken every year... every... in the same years as the Economic Census, so on years ending in 2 and 7. The Agricultural Census is taken by the National Agricultural Statistical Service, which is also a USDA agency. And, those, those, definitions of farms, are also consistent with the NAICS, the North American Industry Classification System that Quinton mentioned previously. And we inherit that definition in our in our data when we're constructing the farm share.

**Ashley:** Thank you both. We'll take one more question. What are the differences between the bills for all food, food at home, and food away from home?

**Quinton:** I'll hand this one to Chandler.

**Chandler:** Thanks, Quinton. So, the Food Dollar for all food is just an average of spending on food at home and food away from home. And when we say food at home, we mean the money you spend at grocery stores, wholesale clubs, places like that, for food that you then plan to take home and prepare yourself to eat. Food away from home refers to places like restaurants. It also includes, like, home delivery or takeaway, and that's food that's... you can think of that as food that's been prepared by a restaurant and served to you. And so, when you spend a dollar, you're generally not spending a dollar, you're generally spending a dollar at one of those two places. And so, we measure all spending on food at home, and measure all spending on food away from home, and the dollar for all food is an average of those two.

**Ashley:** Great, thank you. We'll go ahead and pause there. Thank you all for joining us today. For any additional questions or feedback, please email us at [ers.press@usda.gov](mailto:ers.press@usda.gov), and we'd be happy to hear from you. Next slide, please.

If you enjoyed today's data training webinar and would like to see more, stay tuned. Our next session, coming this June, will spotlight Resource Requirements of Food Demand. More detail will be available soon on our website, or you can subscribe to receive our webinar updates. Next slide.

If you haven't already, take a moment to explore our Charts of Notes series and follow ERS on social for the latest research and insights. We're so glad you could join us today, and hope this training was helpful. Have a great rest of your day. This concludes our webinar.