
**Abstract**

This report presents historical data on food consumption, prices, expenditures, and U.S. income and population. In 1997, each American consumed, on average, 81 pounds more of commercially grown vegetables than in 1970; 65 pounds more of grain products; 57 pounds more of fruit; 32 pounds more of caloric sweeteners; 13 pounds more of total red meat, poultry, and fish (boneless, trimmed equivalent); 17 pounds more of cheese; 13 pounds more of added fats and oils; 3 gallons more of beer; 70 fewer eggs; 10 gallons less of coffee; and 7 gallons less of milk. Retail food prices, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), increased 2.6 percent in 1997. Food price inflation in 1997 was higher than the overall increase in the CPI for all goods and services (2.3 percent) for the third consecutive year. Americans spent $715 billion for food in 1997 and another $95 billion for alcoholic beverages. Away-from-home meals and snacks captured 45 percent of the U.S. food dollar in 1997, up from 39 percent in 1980 and 34 percent in 1970. The percentage of disposable personal income spent on food declined from 13.8 percent in 1970 to 10.7 percent in 1997.

**Keywords:** Food consumption, disappearance data, food use data, food supply, nutrients available for consumption, retail food prices, expenditures.

Note: Use of brand or firm names in this publication does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
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# Contents

Summary ................................................................. ix

Introduction ......................................................... 1

The System for Measuring Food Consumption ................. 1

The Data ................................................................. 3
  Sources ................................................................. 3
  Usefulness .............................................................. 3
  Limitations ............................................................. 3
  Additions and Revisions ............................................ 5

Determinants of Food Consumption and Demand .............. 12

Food Prices ............................................................ 13

Food Expenditures and Income .................................... 14
  Food Expenditures in 1997 .......................................... 14
  Food Expenditures in Relation to Income ....................... 14
  Information About the ERS Food Expenditures Data Set .... 14
  World Food Expenditures .......................................... 15
  Changes in Household Food Consumption
    and Expenditures During the 1980’s .......................... 15

Food Consumption .................................................... 17
  Red Meat, Poultry, and Fish ..................................... 17
  Eggs ........................................................................ 18
  Dairy Products ......................................................... 19
  Fats and Oils ........................................................... 21
  Fruits and Vegetables ................................................ 22
  Flour and Cereal Products ......................................... 23
  Caloric and Low-Calorie Sweeteners ............................. 24
  Beverages ................................................................ 25
  Spices ...................................................................... 25

Nutrients ...................................................................... 26
  Food Energy ............................................................. 26
  Carbohydrate ........................................................... 26
  Protein ..................................................................... 27
  Fat .......................................................................... 27
  Cholesterol ............................................................... 28
  Micronutrients .......................................................... 28
Figures

1. Estimating U.S. food consumption ........................................... 32
2. Changes in U.S. per capita food consumption, 1970-97 ................ 32
3. 1998 total per capita meat consumption was 19 pounds
   above the 1970 level—a new record high ............................... 33
4. Beef is still America’s most popular meat but chicken is gaining ...... 33
5. Long-term decline in total per capita egg consumption levels
   off in the 1990’s ............................................................... 33
6. Commercial sales of dairy products reached a 28-year high
   in 1997 ............................................................................ 33
7. Per capita consumption of beverage milk declined 23 percent
   between 1970 and 1997 .......................................................... 34
8. In 1945, Americans drank more than four times as much milk
   as carbonated soft drinks; in 1997, they downed nearly two and
   a half times more soda than milk ........................................... 34
9. Per capita consumption of cheese in 1997 was 2-1/2 times higher
   than in 1970 ........................................................................ 34
10. Per capita consumption of total fluid cream products nearly doubled
    between 1970 and 1997 .......................................................... 34
11. Total per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables increased
    24 percent between 1970 and 1997 ......................................... 35
12. Fruits and vegetables have led in retail price increases, 1982-97 .... 35
13. Price increases for fresh fruits and vegetables were more than
double those for processed, 1982-97 ....................................... 35
14. Changes in per capita consumption of fresh and processed
    fruits and vegetables, 1982-97 .............................................. 35
15. In 1997, per capita consumption of total added fats and oils
    was 7 percent below 1993’s all-time high level but remained a
    fourth above the 1970 level .................................................. 36
16. In 1997, Americans consumed more than two-fifths of a pound
    of caloric sweeteners per day .............................................. 36
17. In 1997, Americans consumed three-fourths more caloric
    sweeteners per capita than in 1909 ...................................... 36
18. Consumption of candy reached a high of 25 pounds per
    person in 1997 .................................................................. 36
19. Consumption of flour and cereal products increased 48 percent
    between 1970 and 1997, to 200 pounds ............................... 37
20. In 1997, Americans consumed 100 pounds less of flour and
    cereal products than did their counterparts in 1909 ............... 37
21. Per capita beverage consumption, gallons in 1997 ..................... 37
22. Sources of food energy in the U.S. food supply: Fat consumption
    as a percentage of total calories has declined since 1970 but remains
    well above the 1909 level .................................................... 37
23. In 1970, the meat and grain groups contributed equal amounts
    of calories to the U.S. food supply. By 1994, grains had
    surged ahead .................................................................. 38
24. In 1994, grains outpaced sweeteners as the leading contributor to total carbohydrate consumption.

25. A 3-percent increase in total fat consumption between 1970 and 1994 reflects an increase in the use of vegetable fats and oils.


27. Consumer Price Index for all items and food, annual percentage change.

28. Consumer Price Index, food at home and away from home, annual percentage change.


30. Share of income spent for food.
Per Capita Food Consumption, 1970-97

1. Major foods ................................................................. .40
2. Selected items, selected periods ........................................ .41
3. Conversion factors used to obtain retail weight from primary weight .43
4. Red meat (carcass weight) and poultry
   (ready-to-cook weight), 1970-98 .................................... .44
5. Red meat and chicken (retail cut equivalent), 1970-98 ............ .45
6. Red meat, poultry, and fish (boneless, trimmed equivalent), 1970-98 .46
7. Fishery products (edible weight) ...................................... .47
8. Fish and shellfish, by region and country, 1993-95 annual average ... .48
9. Red meat and poultry, 1994-98, by 10 leading countries in 1998 ... .49
10. Eggs, 1970-98 ............................................................... .50
11. Dairy products ............................................................ .51
12. Fluid milk and cream .................................................... .52
13. Selected cheeses ......................................................... .53
14. Food fats and oils ....................................................... .54
15. Fruits and vegetables (farm weight) ................................... .55
16. Fresh and processed fruits (farm weight) ............................ .56
17. Fresh fruits (farm weight) ................................................ .57
18. Fresh fruits (retail-weight equivalent) .................................. .58
19. Canned fruits (product-weight equivalent) ............................ .59
20. Frozen fruits (product-weight equivalent) ............................. .60
21. Dried fruits (product-weight equivalent) ............................... .61
22. Selected fruit juices ..................................................... .62
23. Apples: Per capita utilized production plus imports and
    minus exports, farm-weight equivalent, by use ..................... .63
24. Grapes: Per capita utilized production plus imports and
    minus exports, farm-weight equivalent, by use ..................... .64
25. Pineapples: Per capita utilized production plus imports and minus
    exports, farm-weight equivalent, by use ............................ .65
26. Melons ........................................................................ .66
27. Commercially produced fresh vegetables (farm weight) ............. .67
28. Commercially produced fresh vegetables
    (retail-weight equivalent) ................................................ .68
29. Selected commercially grown vegetables for freezing
    (farm weight) ............................................................... .69
30. Selected commercially grown vegetables for canning
    (farm weight) ............................................................... .70
31. Mushrooms ................................................................... .71
32. Potatoes ....................................................................... .72
33. Pulses, vegetables for dehydrating, and potatoes
    for chips (farm weight) ................................................... .73
34. Flour and cereal products ................................................ .74
35. Breakfast cereals ........................................................... .75
36. Caloric and low-calorie sweeteners (dry weight) .................... .76
37. Candy and other confectionery products: Sales, value, and
supply and utilization, with quantity, per capita consumption,
and value of sugar use .................................................. 77
38. Coffee, tea, and cocoa .................................................. 78
39. Beverages .............................................................. 79
40. Tree nuts and coconuts .................................................. 80
41. Peanuts (kernel basis) .................................................. 81

**Nutrients, 1970-94**
42. U.S. food supply: Nutrients and other food components,
per capita per day ............................................................ 82
43. U.S. food supply: Nutrients contributed from major food
groups per capita per day, 1970 and 1994 .......................... 83

**Supply and Utilization, 1970-97**
44. Beef, 1970-98 .......................................................... 86
45. Veal, 1970-98 ........................................................... 87
46. Lamb, 1970-98 .......................................................... 88
47. Pork, 1970-98 ........................................................... 89
48. Total red meat, 1970-98 ................................................ 90
49. Fresh and frozen fish and shellfish ................................ 91
50. Canned fish and shellfish ............................................. 92
51. Cured fish and shellfish .............................................. 93
52. Total fish and shellfish ................................................ 94
53. Young chicken (broilers), 1970-98 ............................... 95
54. Other chicken, 1970-98 ............................................... 96
55. Total chicken, 1970-98 ............................................... 97
56. Turkey, 1970-98 .................................................... 98
57. Eggs, 1970-98 ............................................................ 99
58. All dairy products .....................................................100
59. American cheese ....................................................101
60. Other cheese ..........................................................102
61. Total cheese ..........................................................103
62. Condensed and evaporated whole milk ..........................104
63. Nonfat dry milk .......................................................105
64. Butter .................................................................106
65. Lard (direct use) .....................................................107
66. Margarine .............................................................108
67. Shortening ............................................................109
68. Salad and cooking oils .............................................110
69. Peanuts (farmers’ stock basis) ....................................111
70. Fresh citrus fruits (farm weight) .................................112
71. Fresh apples (farm weight) .......................................113
72. Other fresh noncitrus fruits (farm weight) ......................114
73. Total fresh fruits (farm weight) ................................ 115
74. Total tree nuts (shelled basis) ....................................116
75. Fresh market potatoes (farm weight) ...........................117
76. Potatoes for freezing (farm weight) .............................118
77. Tomatoes for processing (farm weight) ........................................ 119
78. Wheat (grain equivalent) ......................................................... 120
79. Wheat flour ........................................................................ 121
80. Rye (grain equivalent) ............................................................. 122
81. Rice ..................................................................................... 123
82. Corn (grain equivalent) .......................................................... 124
83. Oats (grain equivalent) ........................................................... 125
84. Barley (grain equivalent) .......................................................... 126
85. Total cane and beet sugar (raw value) ...................................... 127
86. High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) (dry weight) ......................... 128
87. Glucose syrup (dry weight) ....................................................... 129
88. Dextrose (dry weight) .............................................................. 130
89. Coffee (green bean equivalent) ................................................ 131
90. Tea (dry leaf equivalent) .......................................................... 132
91. Cocoa (bean equivalent) .......................................................... 133
92. Spices and herbs ................................................................. 134
93. Import share of food disappearance for selected foods,
    selected years ................................................................. 136

**Prices, 1970-97**
94. Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers ....................... 139
95. Consumer Price Index for food, major groups ......................... 140
96. Consumer Price Index for food and beverages
    at home, selected categories ............................................... 141
97. Consumer Price Index for food, 1987-97, quarterly .................. 144
98. Average retail food prices, individual items, 1986-97 ............... 146

**Income and Expenditures, 1970-97**
99. Food expenditures by families and individuals
    as a share of disposable personal income ............................... 148
100. Household expenditures for food in relation to income,
    after taxes, by income group, 1996 .................................... 148

**Total Expenditures, 1970-97**
101. Percent of total personal consumption expenditures spent
    on food and alcoholic beverages that were consumed
    at home, by selected countries, 1994 ................................. 149
102. Food and alcoholic beverages ............................................. 150
103. Food at home ................................................................. 151
104. Food away from home ...................................................... 152
105. Alcoholic beverages ......................................................... 153
106. Food expenditures, by source of funds ................................ 154

**Other, 1970-98**
107. Population: Total, resident, and civilian ............................. 155
Summary

Consistent with dietary and health recommendations, Americans now consume about 50 percent more grain products and about 25 percent more fruits and vegetables per capita than they did in 1970, eat leaner meat, and drink lower fat milk. But contrary to recommendations, they are consuming record-high amounts of caloric sweeteners and some high-fat dairy products and near-record-high amounts of added fats, including salad and cooking oils.

In 1997, Americans consumed an average of 13 pounds more of total red meat, poultry, and fish (boneless, trimmed equivalent) than in 1970, but 10 gallons less of coffee and 7 gallons less of milk. Americans consumed per capita 81 pounds more of commercially grown vegetables, 65 pounds more of grain products, 57 pounds more of fruit, 32 pounds more of caloric sweeteners, 17 pounds more of cheese, 13 pounds more of added fats and oils, 3 gallons more of beer, and 70 fewer eggs.

Retail food prices, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), increased 2.6 percent in 1997, slightly above the 2.3-percent increase in the CPI for all goods and services. Americans spent $715 billion for food in 1997 and another $95 billion for alcoholic beverages.

In 1997, 45 percent of U.S. food spending went for away-from-home meals and snacks, up from 34 percent in 1970 and 39 percent in 1980. The percentage of disposable personal income spent on food declined from 13.8 percent in 1970 to 10.7 percent in 1997.

Evidence from various sources suggests that Americans now consume, on average, more total food, more snacks, bigger portions of food, and more calories than they did 29 years ago.

In 1994 (the latest year for which nutrient data are available), total meat, poultry, and fish contributed 30 percent less saturated fat to the per capita food supply than in 1970 and beverage milk contributed 50 percent less saturated fat.

A variety of factors are responsible for the changes in U.S. food consumption patterns in the last 29 years, including changes in relative food prices, increases in real (adjusted for inflation) disposable income, and more food assistance for the poor. New products, particularly more convenient ones, also contribute to shifts in consumption, along with more imports, growth in the away-from-home food market, expanded advertising programs, and changes in food-enrichment standards and fortification policy. Sociodemographic trends also driving food choices include smaller households, more two-earner households, more single-parent households, an aging population, and increased ethnic diversity. An expanded scientific base relating diet and health, new Dietary Guidelines for Americans designed to help people make food choices that promote health and prevent disease, improved nutrition labeling, and a burgeoning interest in nutrition also influence marketing and consumption trends.
ERS food consumption data are based on the amount of food available for consumption each year in the United States. Estimates of food for human consumption are derived by subtracting measurable uses such as exports, industrial uses, farm inputs, and end-of-year stocks from total supply (the sum of domestic production, imports, and beginning stocks). Accordingly, the data are indirect measures of consumption.