

Demand Fuel

Consumer preference for meat shines brightly.

by *Wes Ishmael*

Domestic meat sales reached a record high of \$104.6 billion last year, and pounds sold increased 2.3% year over year, according to the 20th annual *Power of Meat* report (POM) released in March at the Annual Meat Conference hosted by the Meat Institute and FMI, The Food Industry Association.

“With most Americans so confident in meat as a nutrient powerhouse that is top of mind for protein needs, it’s no surprise people are buying more meat than ever,” says Julie Anna Potts, Meat Institute president and CEO.

Consumers, on average, purchase meat more than once per week¹, according to the POM report. Nearly all (98%) of American households purchase meat¹ and 73% of Americans view meat as an overall healthy choice. Getting enough protein is very/somewhat important to 90% of Americans, and animal proteins, including eggs, top the list of foods that most consumers view as protein-rich foods.

Other priorities among meat shoppers include preparing comfort meals, having quick prep options and getting creative with ingredients (see *The Power of Meat 2025*, page 28).

“As shoppers’ definition of value has expanded to include price, quality, relevance, convenience and experience, they are including meat in 90% of home-cooked dinners and looking for various options to suit their schedules, tastes and interests,” explains Rick Stein, FMI vice president of fresh foods. “Whether shoppers are looking for the convenience of new ground meats or incorporating semi-prepared options in their meal prep, the meat department delivers.”

The average American shops for meat 54 times per year and spends \$16.12 on meat per trip¹.

Beef quality charge

Meat eaters maintain a strong appetite for beef. Driven by increasing carcass quality, demand was record-high in 2023 and nearly as high last year, according to CattleFax.

Fresh beef retail sales surpassed \$40 billion last year and accounted for more than 55% of all fresh meat sales, per the latest *Beef Industry Review and Consumer Insights* (BIRCI) from the industry’s Beef Checkoff-funded research program.

Beef occupies most of the retail fresh meat sales in terms of dollars and has one of the largest shares in terms of volume sales, according to the BIRCI, with fresh ground beef comprising half of beef sales in volume at the retail meat case and 36% of dollar sales.

“Despite economic pressures, consumers continue to pay premiums for higher-quality beef. Choice grade or better remains in high demand, reinforcing the strength of the premium beef market,” explained Kevin Good, CattleFax vice president of market analysis, at February’s CattleFax Outlook Seminar.

Increased consumer beef demand parallels the beef industry’s focus on carcass quality.

Through mid-March, year to date, 84.3% of fed cattle graded Choice and higher — 10.9% Prime and 73.4% Choice, according to USDA data. That was 1% more than the annual sum in 2024. For perspective, 74.2% graded Choice and higher in 2015 — 5.1% Prime and 69.1% Choice.

“My experience has been that consumers of premium products will sacrifice in other areas of spending to remain in the premium category because it is important to them,” says Ernie Davis, Certified Hereford Beef® president and CEO. “You see that demonstrated by long-time *Certified Hereford Beef* customers and the growing interest of consumers who have yet to enjoy the unique premium experience the brand offers.”

Editor’s Note:

¹Sales and purchase dynamics data are provided by Circana for the 52 weeks ending 12/29/24.

The Power of Meat study was conducted by 210 Analytics on behalf of FMI, The Food Industry Association, and the Meat Foundation and sponsored by CRYOVAC® Brand Food Packaging.