

KSU Retail Demand Indices: Beef, Pork and Chicken Compared

Peaks, lows, and statistical tests of change over the whole period, last 10 years and last 5 years (Jan. 1988 = 100; data through June 2026)

<https://agmanager.info/livestock-meat/meat-demand/monthly-domestic-meat-demand-indices-usdabls-data>

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Data through June 2026 | September 15, 2026

What the indices measure — and how to compare them

Each index is how much of the product was purchased relative to what that month's retail price would normally be expected to move.

Rising = demand shifted out; falling = demand shifted in.

Price effects are already netted out.

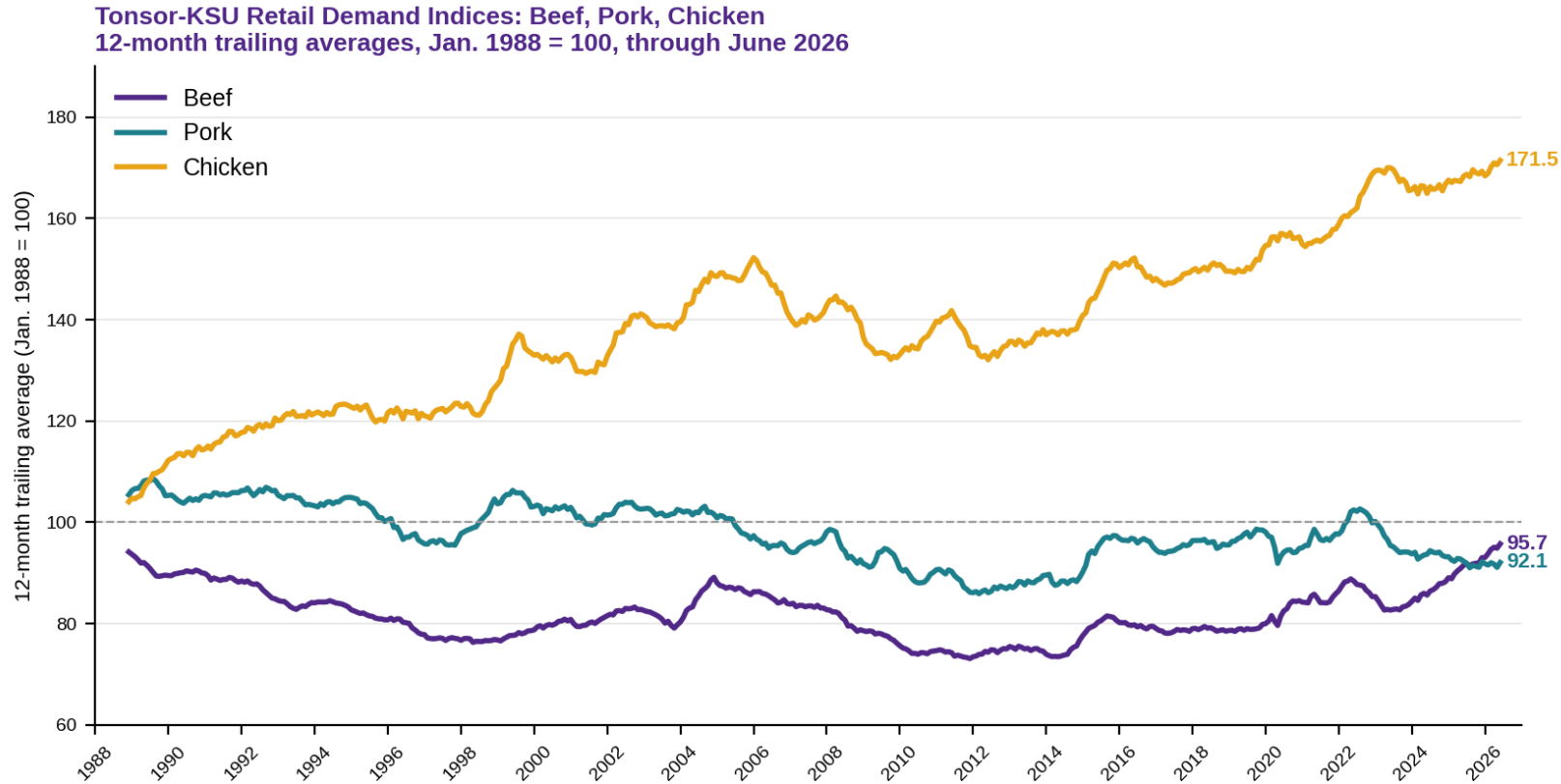
Levels are NOT comparable across products.

Each index is scaled to its own Jan. 1988 = 100.

Chicken at 171 and beef at 96 means chicken demand is 71% above its own 1988 level and beef is 4% below its own — not that chicken demand is 'bigger'.

What IS comparable: growth rates, rankings within each series, turning points, and the statistical tests on this basis — which is what the following slides do.

Three different stories, 1988–2026



Source: Glynn Tonsor, Kansas State University, AgManager.info (USDA/BLS data). Each index is scaled to its own Jan. 1988 = 100; levels compare each product to its own 1988 demand, not to each other.

Beef: a U-shape.

Demand eroded from the 1988 base to a 12-month-average trough of 73.1 (Dec 2011), then climbed for a dozen years to a record 95.7 in June 2026.

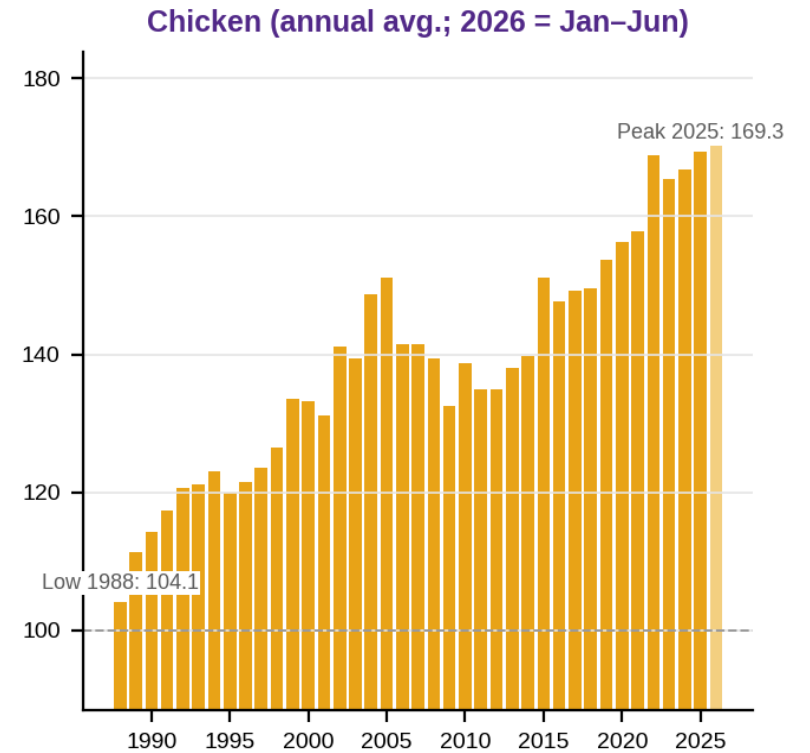
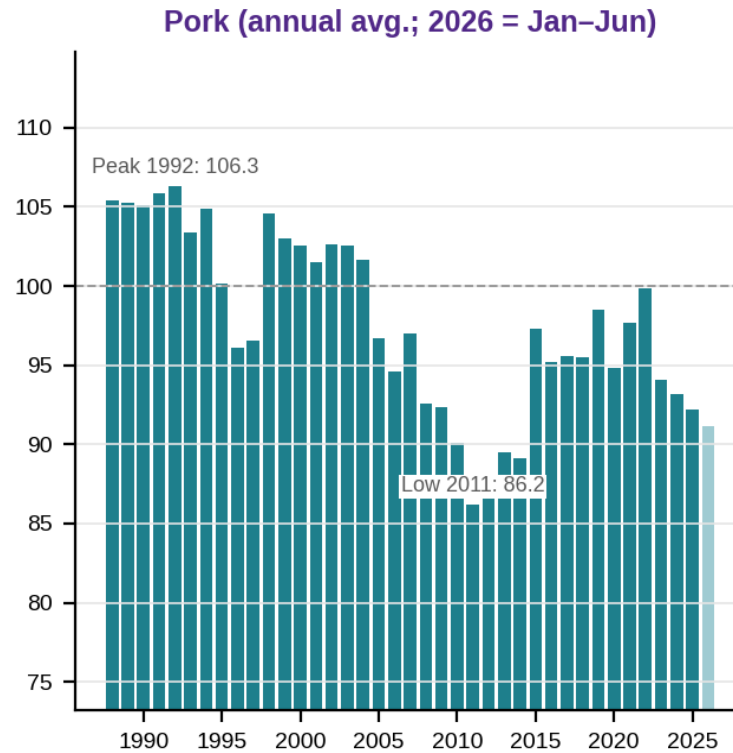
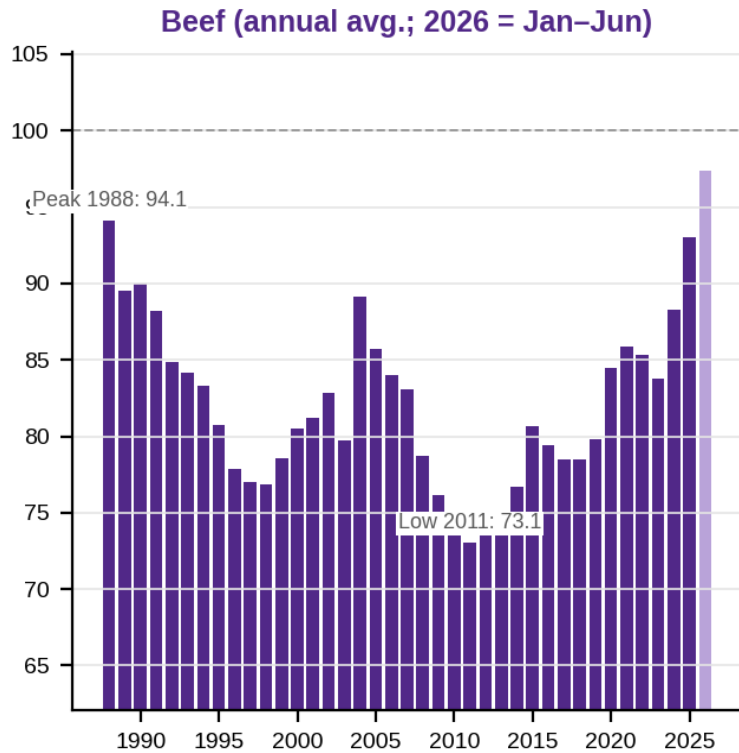
Pork: long, slow erosion.

Demand peaked early (12-month average 108.6 in Aug 1989; calendar-year peak 1992), bottomed in Mar 2012 at 85.9, recovered part-way by 2016–2022, and has softened since.

Chicken: sustained growth.

Demand rose in nearly every period, from a 12-month-average low of 104.1 (Dec 1988) to a record 171.5 in June 2026, with one extended setback in 2007–2012 (12-month average low of 132.1 in Jun 2012).

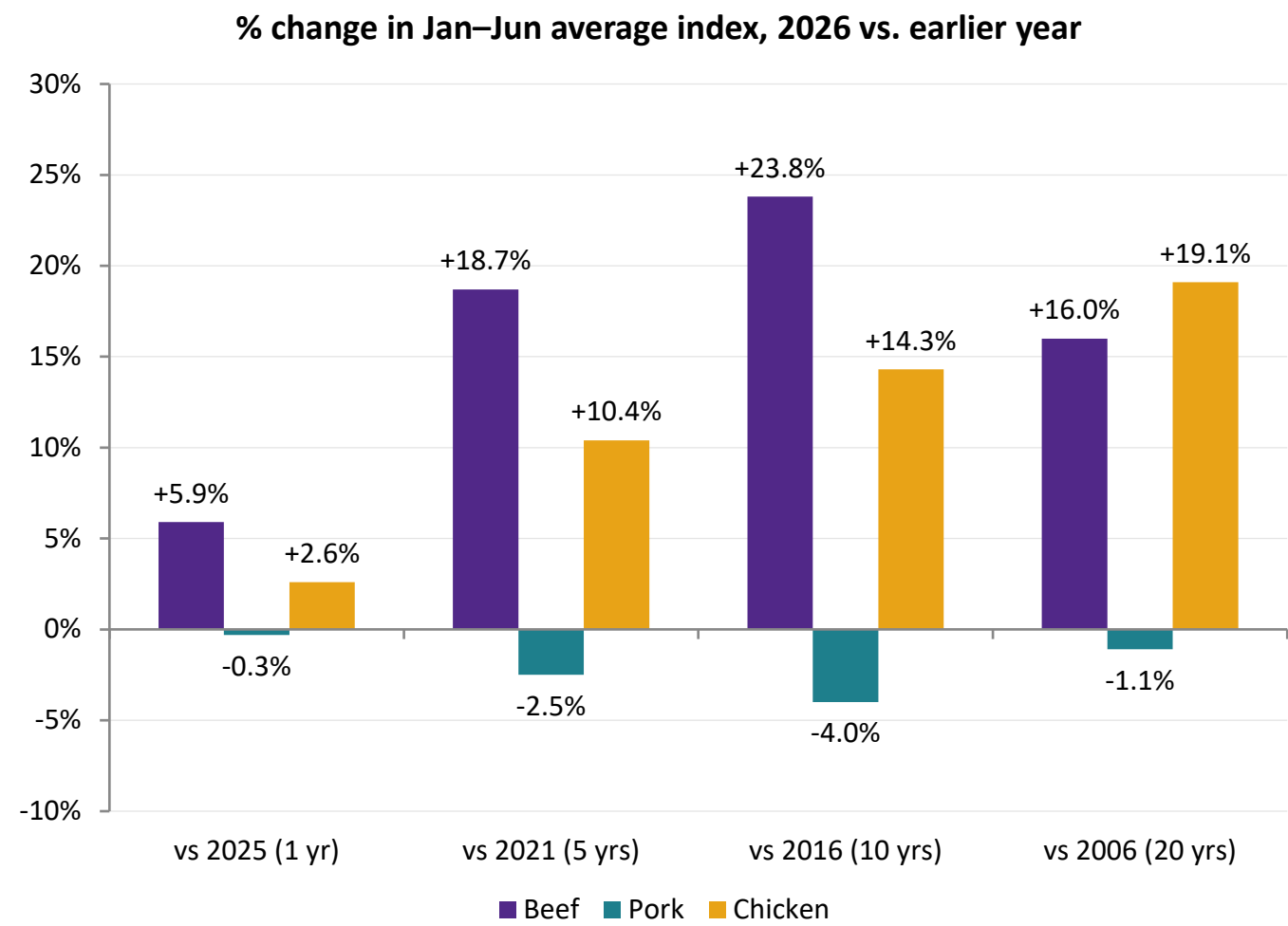
Annual averages with peak and low years



Lighter bar = Jan–Jun 2026 (partial year). Dashed line = Jan. 1988 base.

- Beef bottomed in 2011 and is now at a first-half record
- Pork peaked in 1992, bottomed in 2011 and has drifted lower since 2022
- Chicken has set new highs in 2025–2026

January–June 2026 vs. 1, 5, 10 and 20 years earlier



Jan–Jun 2026 vs.	Beef	Pork	Chicken
Jan–Jun 2026 average (rank of 39)	97.4 (1st)	91.2 (32nd)	170.3 (1st)
2025 (1 year earlier)	+5.9%	-0.3%	+2.6%
2021 (5 years earlier)	+18.7%	-2.5%	+10.4%
2016 (10 years earlier)	+23.8%	-4.0%	+14.3%
2006 (20 years earlier)	+16.0%	-1.1%	+19.1%

Beef: 1st of 39 first halves.
Chicken: 1st of 39.
Pork: 32nd of 39.

- Beef's gains are the largest against every base year except 2006
- Pork is lower than every base year
- Chicken's gain grows with distance because its growth has been steady.

Has each index changed? Tests within each index

Index	Window	Trend, % per yr	p-value	Mean: 1st half → 2nd half	p-value (Welch t)
Beef	Whole period	-0.06%	0.608 n.s.	83.5 → 80.9	<0.001 ***
Beef	Last 10 years	+2.07%	<0.001 ***	80.5 → 88.8	<0.001 ***
Beef	Last 5 years	+2.63%	0.011 **	85.6 → 92.0	<0.001 ***
Pork	Whole period	-0.35%	<0.001 ***	102.0 → 93.5	<0.001 ***
Pork	Last 10 years	-0.33%	0.138 n.s.	95.8 → 95.2	0.715 n.s.
Pork	Last 5 years	-2.45%	<0.001 ***	98.0 → 92.4	0.007 ***
Chicken	Whole period	+1.02%	<0.001 ***	127.6 → 150.0	<0.001 ***
Chicken	Last 10 years	+1.80%	<0.001 ***	151.9 → 167.3	<0.001 ***
Chicken	Last 5 years	+1.08%	0.006 ***	166.0 → 168.5	0.389 n.s.

*Trend = OLS of log index on time + monthly dummies, Newey–West (HAC) s.e., annualized. Mean test = Welch t on first vs second half of the window. Windows: whole = Jan 1988–Jun 2026; 10 yrs = Jul 2016–Jun 2026; 5 yrs = Jul 2021–Jun 2026. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.*

Summary: Beef flat over 38 years (decline then recovery cancel out) but growing significantly over 10 and 5 years; Pork declining over the full period and the last 5 years; Chicken growing significantly in every window, with the 5-year mean test showing the pace has slowed.

Do the indices move differently? Pairwise tests – across indices

Pair (A vs B)	Window	Growth gap A-B, % pts/yr	p-value	Mean YoY change, A vs B	p-value (Welch t)
Beef vs Pork	Whole period	+0.30%	0.003 ***	+0.26% vs -0.01%	0.592 n.s.
Beef vs Pork	Last 10 years	+2.41%	<0.001 ***	+2.13% vs -0.04%	0.052 *
Beef vs Pork	Last 5 years	+5.21%	<0.001 ***	+2.72% vs -0.82%	0.018 **
Beef vs Chicken	Whole period	-1.06%	<0.001 ***	+0.26% vs +1.61%	0.004 ***
Beef vs Chicken	Last 10 years	+0.26%	0.398 n.s.	+2.13% vs +1.37%	0.396 n.s.
Beef vs Chicken	Last 5 years	+1.53%	0.213 n.s.	+2.72% vs +2.14%	0.652 n.s.
Pork vs Chicken	Whole period	-1.36%	<0.001 ***	-0.01% vs +1.61%	0.002 ***
Pork vs Chicken	Last 10 years	-2.10%	<0.001 ***	-0.04% vs +1.37%	0.169 n.s.
Pork vs Chicken	Last 5 years	-3.50%	<0.001 ***	-0.82% vs +2.14%	0.030 **

Growth gap = trend regression on $\log(A) - \log(B)$ with monthly dummies and HAC s.e.; positive = A grew faster than B. Mean YoY = Welch t comparing average year-over-year % change of A vs B. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Summary: Beef and Chicken have both significantly outgrown Pork in every window, and the gaps have widened in the last 5 years. Beef vs Chicken: chicken grew faster over the full period, but over the last 10 and 5 years their growth rates are statistically indistinguishable.

Key takeaways

Beef

Record high, growing

Jan–Jun 2026 ranks 1st of 39; +2.1%/yr over 10 yrs ($p < 0.001$).

Pork

Below base, slipping

Jan–Jun 2026 ranks 32nd of 39; -2.5%/yr over 5 yrs ($p < 0.001$).

Chicken

Record high, slowing

Jan–Jun 2026 ranks 1st of 39; +1.1%/yr over 5 yrs, down from +1.8%/yr over 10 yrs.

Bottom line: Beef and Chicken demand are at record highs and the recent growth rates are statistically indistinguishable from each other; Pork demand is significantly weaker than both and has declined over the last five years.

The indices measure demand; they are not consumption or price forecasts. 2026 is a partial year (six months).