U.S. total red meat and poultry consumption plateaued in 2020 after gaining pounds per person since 2014. Note: Per capita consumption, or more correctly per capita disappearance, is a calculation that divides total disappearance (Domestic Production + Imports - Exports – Ending Stocks) by population estimates. It is not how much each person actually consumed of each product type within the year.

The 2020 consumption figure is estimated at 224.63 pounds per person including beef, pork, total chicken, turkey and lamb. That figure is a new record high, outpacing 2019’s 224.1 pounds per person. Chicken remains the largest per person consumption category, accounting to 97.51 pounds per person in 2020, which is also a new record high for chicken consumption. In 2019, chicken consumption per person accelerated adding 2.52 pounds per person to the 2018 number, and 2020 added another 1.04 pounds per person.

Turkey consumption declined from the prior year, dropping 0.22 pounds per person, and surprisingly lamb saw bigger than expected gains, up 0.03 pounds per person. Lamb consumption per person reached the highest level since 2002 in 2020, 1.17 pounds per person. Beef per capita consumption increased slightly in 2020, up 0.20 pounds. Pork consumption also declined, shaving 0.42 pounds per person off 2019’s number. Per capita red meat and poultry consumption has averaged a 1.8% gain every year since 2014. The increase in 2015 was very large, a 4.6% increase over 2014, with figures for pork increasing nearly 4 pounds per person and chicken increasing almost 5.5 pound per person. This was at least in part because beef prices were so high. Consumers substituted away from beef to some degree, and per capita consumption for beef declined slightly. But overall, meat and poultry consumption has continued to climb.

The eleven years prior to 2015 saw consecutive year-over-year decreases to per capita meat consumption, falling more than 20 pounds per person during that timeframe. Since 1974 meat and poultry per capita trends have ebbed and flowed, related to diet tastes and preferences, changes to population and production.

Population growth is assumed to continue on pace, with deaths related to the pandemic not large enough to change population growth patterns. That growth rate is expected to outpace production rises in pork, and chicken in 2021. Beef and lamb production are both expected to decline in 2021 and 2022, lowering calculations for per capita consumption. Chicken consumption is expected to fall to the greatest degree in the next two years dropping to under 96 pounds per person, and the lowest since 2018. Beef per capita figures are expected to decline 1.84 pounds in 2021, and lose another pound in 2022. Pork consumption is projected to decrease in 2021, but will likely increase in 2022, falling closer to 2019’s number. Lamb, usually a stable consumption figure of just over 1 pound per person per year, is unlikely to hold onto 2020 gains, and is expected to fall in 2021 and 2022. Turkey is expected to bounce back in 2021, as limited social interaction greatly hindered holiday turkey consumption in 2020.