PROTEIN AS A BRAND

Obsession, Fad, or Here to Stay?

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HOW WE GOT HERE

Chicken has a new brand attribute to promote

PROTEIN.

Not a cut, not a recipe, not a price.

Protein is now on the front of the package, the menu, and in the health narrative.

Chicken is America's most-consumed protein — but why do we not market protein more?

Our conversation: how we got here, whether it lasts, and what to do about it.

103

pounds of chicken per person, per year

The most-consumed animal protein in America (USDA ERS, 2025)

HOW WE GOT HERE

7 in 10

Americans are actively trying to add protein to their diets.

This is not just for bodybuilders anymore. Welcome to the mainstream.

~80%

make it a

DAILY PRIORITY

Source: IFIC Food & Health Survey, 2025

HOW WE GOT HERE

Who drove the protein boom?

Protein didn't get hot for one reason. It’s a perfect storm of six different impacts.

GLP-1 users

Protecting muscle while eating far less

Athletes & gym culture

Macro-tracking goes fully mainstream

Weight management

#1 health goal for 2026 — 52%

Carb-deniers

Keto / low-carb's long, durable tail

Extreme-wellness lifestyles

Optimization culture and clean eating

MAHA & federal policy

New dietary guidelines: protein at every meal

HOW WE GOT HERE

From the supplement aisle to every aisle

01
A bodybuilder thing
Powders, shakes, the gym bag

→

02
A diet thing
Atkins, keto, high-protein diets

→

03
A new health signal
“High in protein” = “good for you”

Today, the federal food pyramid is inverted — meat and dairy at the base. (USDA 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines)


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America's protein craze is driving a global whey shortage

Delivering more of the world's freshest flavors
Oppy

Subscribe to our free newsletter today to keep up to date with the latest food industry news.

For years, whey protein occupied a

Where Has All the Cottage Cheese Gone?

TikTok and "protein-maxxing" are driving a cottage cheese squeeze that's left some consumers desperate.

CHICKEN MARKETING SUMMIT

#ChickenMarketingSummit

HOW WE GOT HERE

The retail reality

ASSORTMENT EXPANSION

Retailers are building the protein shelf.

Walmart and Target are adding high-protein products to their assortments.

Retailers also control their own private-label protein lines.

Protein expands the basket.

SHOPPER EDUCATION

Protein is becoming a retail media story.

Kroger's data team found **47% of shoppers** planned to eat more protein as part of a healthy diet.

57% said they would like nutrition information while shopping in a grocery store.

Protein teaches at shelf.

MERCHANDISING FLEXIBILITY

Protein can move across the store.

Cross-category placement and pairings create more ways to signal protein value.

Protein products can live in multiple aisles, from meat case to enhanced waters.

Protein travels across aisles.

VALUE + PREMIUM

The meat case can play both lanes.

Retailers can offer both value and premium protein options.

Demand is strong for pre-marinated proteins, heat-and-serve options, and premium but accessible choices.

Protein protects price points.

“Proteinified”: the trend made visible

When a claim shows up everywhere, it has become a brand.

- **Protein coffee. Protein pancakes.** *Fine. Makes sense.*
- **Protein ice cream (Blue Bell).** *Okay…*
- **Protein Doritos — 10g, up from 2g.** *PepsiCo: 70% of people want their chips to have protein.*
- **Protein Pop-Tarts — doubled to 10g / serving.** *Still 400 calories. Still 31g of sugar. ~2.5g more protein per pastry.*

When a Pop-Tart is a protein food, protein isn't a nutrient anymore.
It has evolved from a marketing position to a full-on brand.

PROTEIN-WASHING or BRAND LEVERAGING?

Same Pop-Tart. New Healthy Halo.

Kellanova's "Protein" Pop-Tarts clear the 10g high-protein label threshold by adding milk and wheat protein to the existing recipe.

REGULAR

5g

protein per serving (2 pastries)

Everything else, unchanged:
~400 cal • 31g sugar
same fat & carbs

"PROTEIN"

10g

protein per serving (2 pastries)

Everything else, unchanged:
~400 cal • 31g sugar
same fat & carbs

The takeaway: +5g of protein (about 2.5g per tart) earns a "high protein" claim on a product with the same calories and sugar. The label changed; the food didn't.

Source: Pop-Tarts product labeling; Tasting Table and Delish nutrition comparisons, 2025.

RESTAURANTS ARE **DIVING IN …**

CHICKEN MARKETING SUMMIT

HOW WE GOT HERE

Protein is a menu strategy, not a nutrition fact

TRAFFIC DRIVER

Consumers seek it.

6 in 10 actively seek high-protein menu items.

Nearly half choose a meal specifically because it is high in protein.

Protein drives visits.

PRICING POWER

Consumers pay for it.

38% will pay a premium for a high-protein meal.

Protein-forward positioning isn't just marketing. It is a revenue driver.

Protein supports margins.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Consumers switch for it.

Nearly half would choose another restaurant for better protein options.

When other features are comparable, protein-forward language becomes a merchandising tool.

Protein wins share.

DAYPART OPPORTUNITY

Consumers want more of it.

More than half associate protein with dinner.

Only about a quarter think about protein at lunch, leaving whitespace for earlier dayparts.

Protein expands occasions.

ACT II

Obsession, fad, or here to stay?

The question you came for — and a straight answer.

THE LENS

A category sells a product. A movement sells an identity.

CATEGORY	MOVEMENT
Something people buy.	**Something people are.**
Competes on price, features, convenience.	Commands a premium. Inspires loyalty. Outlasts trends.

Protein broke through. People don't just eat protein; they ***define themselves as*** *"high-protein people." That identity signals discipline, health, being in control.*

THE LENS

It’s not the first time...

ORGANIC

The movement that worked

$76.6B in 2025, growing at double the conventional rate. Shoppers still pay a premium for the identity.

Identity + substance = durable

PLANT-BASED

The movement that stalled

U.S. retail sales fell ~7.5% in 2025. The promise of “healthy & conscious” collided with “ultra-processed.”

Identity with contradiction = confusion

PROTEIN

The movement happening now

On the front of every package. The question: which path does it follow — organic's, or plant-based's?

Identity? Yes. Staying power? TBD.

THE LENS

Chicken's moment is here:

Plant-based attempted an identity its product couldn't back. ***Chicken can back it.***

- **Chicken is *real* food:** Not ultra-processed, not a lab burger
- **Chicken already has the substance:** High-quality protein, naturally, without additives or reformulation
- **Opportunity beyond category:** Chicken sells the commodity product. It hasn't yet sold the belonging.

THE VERDICT

The protein brand will likely stay… and evolve.

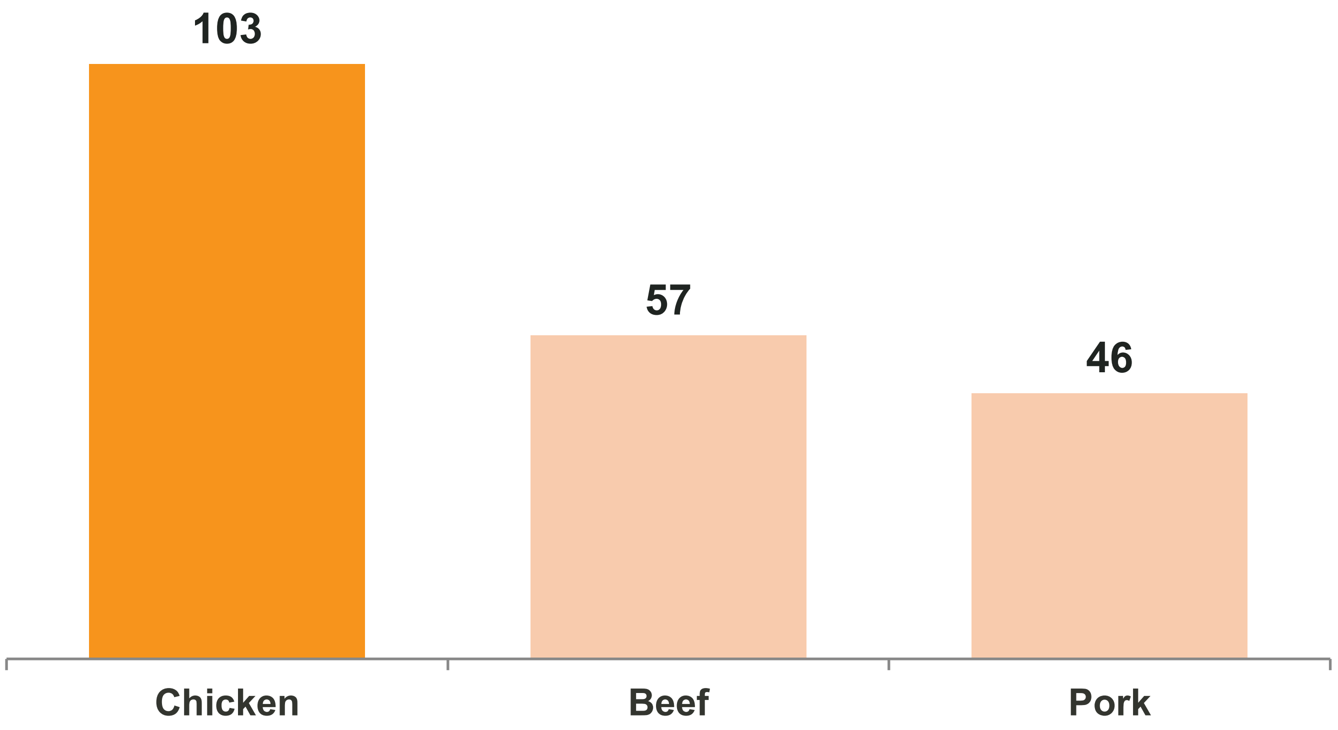
The demand is structural, not seasonal. Three separate levers bring it home.

HEALTH	POLICY	COMMERCIAL
GLP-1 use roughly doubled in 18 months — ~12.4% of U.S. adults by 2025 (Gallup). It isn't reversing, and newly open to Medicare.	Federal guidelines now institutionalize "protein at every meal."	GLP-1 households will represent 35% of food & beverage sales by 2030 (Circana).

Three such different elements rarely pull the same way. When they do, it goes past being a fad.

THE ROAD MAP

Chicken wins volume already



U.S. per-capita availability, pounds (USDA ERS, 2025)

#1

animal protein in America

- ✓ Passed beef in 2010
- ✓ 13 consecutive years of growth

So how can chicken increase its share of the protein premium?

Category volume leadership ≠ brand leadership

Near market saturation	Per-capita chicken growth nears the ceiling of share it can take from beef and pork. (WATT, 2026)
Out of runway	More pounds is no longer the growth story.
The new strategy	The next growth opportunity is value per pound.

Branding adaptation: From commodity to benefit

HOW CHICKEN SELLS TODAY

- Price per pound
- Common cuts and weight
- A commodity in the case

HOW PROTEIN BRANDS MARKET

- Protein value for health
- Convenience, multi-meal utility
- Daily nutrition choice

Your competitor is the protein bar, the shake, the "proteinified" everything.

Four lanes to position chicken

1 **Everyday, Easy High-Protein**

The known, all-family go-to

2 **Lean Protein for Weight Management**

The GLP-1 market is the fastest-growing

3 **Muscle & Strength Support**

Active fitness and aging consumers alike

4 **Responsibly Raised, Trustworthy Protein**

Real food, from farmers, that's familiar

What it looks like — at retail and on the menu

FOR RETAIL & MERCHANDISING

- Front-of-pack protein callouts by cut (“31g protein per serving”)
- Family packs framed as meal-stretch, protein solutions, not bulk discounts
- “Best for…” uses: meal prep, post-workout, multi-meal, dayparting
- Protein-comparison education, RD partnerships

FOR RESTAURANT & FOODSERVICE

- Protein-forward menu language (“40g protein bowl”)
- Chicken as the default build-a-bowl protein
- Create high-protein / GLP-1-friendly menu section and feature chicken
- Foodservice is where the premium is easiest

The model already exists, and chicken should own it.

Trust is the REAL FOOD non-negotiable

"Real food"

Not a powder, not a lab product

Origin & care

Animal-care commitments, sustainability

Transparency over perfection

Consumers STILL want to know where their food comes from

Our own research tells us: The "Real Food" movement has traction. Inspire research found that well over half of survey respondents believe MAHA has "their best interests at heart." Today's consumer is balancing cost, convenience and nutrition. Chicken punches above their weight in all three areas.

Lesson: Lasting Brands Avoid Risk

- Overclaiming and losing trust through protein-washing
- Trying to compete head-on with supplements
- Inconsistent claims across cuts and products
- In your face “protein” marketing that leaves no room for trend shifts

TAKEAWAYS

What matters most for all of you here today

01 **Protein-as-a-brand is here to stay,** but the expression will evolve.

02 **Chicken already won on volume,** ladder up with protein brand and value.

03 **Your competitor is the snack and supplement aisle,** not other animal proteins.

04 **Own trust + simplicity + *REAL* food;** it's our premium differentiator.

Hinda Mitchell · Inspire