

## Genetics tapped to increase chicken size as American tastes and waists expand

Chicken is the most commonly eaten animal in this country, surpassing beef or pork. And with dietary recommendations that Americans eat less red meat, the obsession with chicken—which has lasted more than 30 years already—shows no sign of stopping.

Maintaining that appetite, though, is already pushing the bounds of what's biologically possible—and perhaps what's humane.

The average American eats more than four times as much chicken today as he or she did in the early 1900s, according to data from the USDA. Currently, that amounts to more than 80 pounds, or roughly nine chickens, per year.

“If people keep eating more and more chicken, chickens will probably have to get even bigger,” said Dr. Michael Lilburn, a professor at Ohio State University's Poultry Research Center. “We'll have to increase the proportion of breast meat in each bird, too.”

Lilburn's estimations are hardly revolutionary. Chickens, after all, have been getting bigger—and breastier—for decades on the heels of inflated demand.

That's because Americans mostly want white meat, so much of it, in fact, that we have long [had to export](#) all the extra dark meat that's left over.

And the poultry industry has had to adjust to keep up.

Largely the industry has made do by selecting for certain economically advantageous genetic traits. Specifically bigger birds with bigger white-meat-filled breasts.

“I don't think we've seen the limit,” Lilburn said. “We'll probably see a limit when we start getting into product quality issues, when the side-effects are too burdensome. But we aren't there yet.”

**Read full, original article:** [Look at what our obsession with white meat has done to chickens](#)