

‘Meat: It’s still what’s for dinner.’ Can popular plant-based burgers really displace beef?

Walmart now peddles house-brand vegan “chick’n patties,” and KFC is [trialing](#) not-chicken nuggets developed by Beyond Meat.

But here’s a question: When will all this plant-based “meat” consumption start to curtail the US appetite for the real stuff? Americans [lead the globe in carnivory](#), and the great bulk of our meat supply comes from massive confinement operations that [spew greenhouse gases](#), [pollute air in other ways](#), and [foul water](#). Venture capital [darlings](#) like [Impossible Foods](#) may claim their ground legume patties—tweaked to look and taste like flesh—hold the key to enticing consumers to cut back.

But so far, there’s no sign of it.

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The US Department of Agriculture just released [2020 numbers](#) on meat consumption. For chicken, pork, and even beef—so far, the main target of Silicon Valley disruption—the per capita numbers have crept up since 2016, the year the Manhattan restaurant Momofuku Nishi [served the first](#) Impossible Burger.

Sure, tech-enhanced, hyper-realistic fake meat hasn’t been around long enough for any definitive judgment of its efficacy. Maybe it’ll eventually work. Or maybe Americans are treating the Impossible Burger like an amuse bouche—a palate-tickling prelude to a meaty meal.

Meat: It's Still What's for Dinner

Annual per capita US meat consumption in pounds (boneless retail weight).

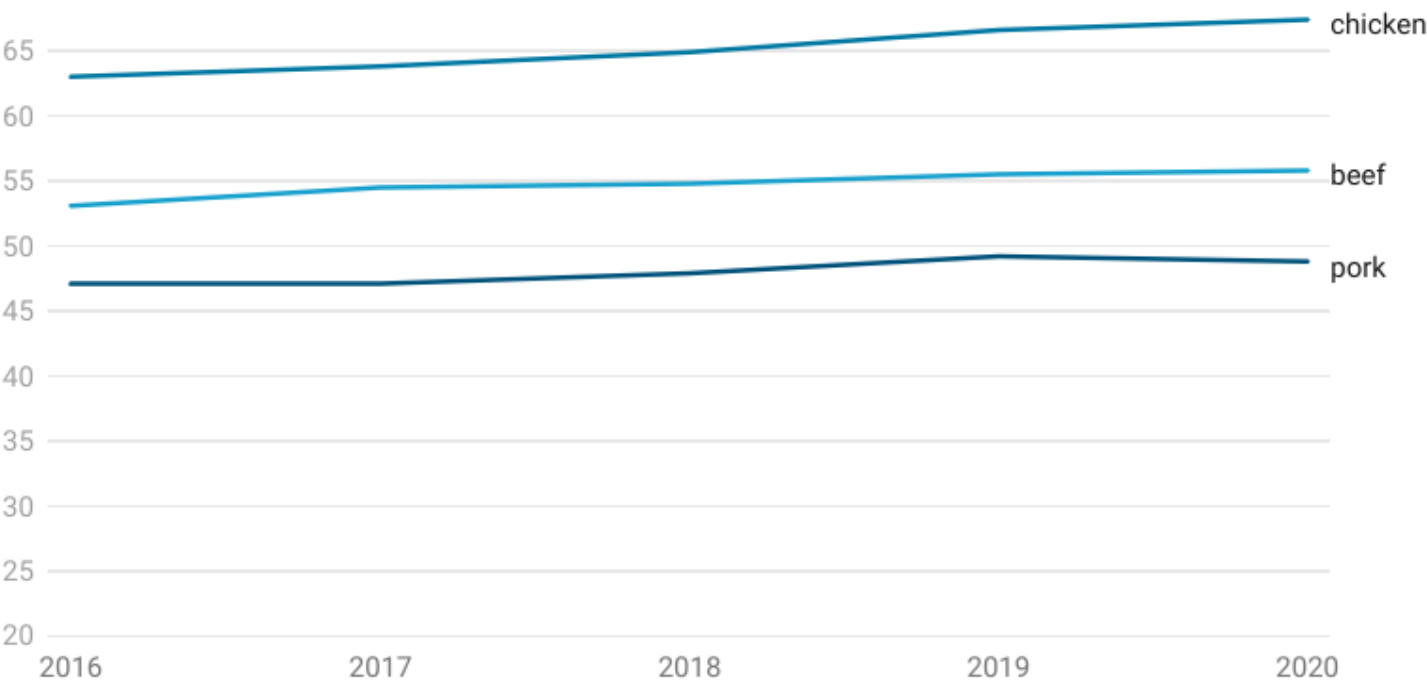


Chart: Tom Philpott • Source: [USDA](#) • [Get the data](#)

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