**Fresh Meat Shines, While Processed Meat Sales Softened**

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**September in Review**

* **Sentiment dips:** U.S. consumer sentiment fell to its lowest level since May, according to the University of Michigan. The Consumer Sentiment Index declined to 55.1 in September, down from 58.2 in August, as inflation and job security concerns weighed on confidence.
* **Spending softens:** Consumer caution is reflected in moderating sales. Year-to-date, total retail food and beverage unit sales were up slightly (+0.7%), but fell to zero gains in the third quarter. In September, dollar growth slowed to just 2%, while unit sales declined 0.5%.
* **Category performance:** Center-store grocery saw a 1.0% decline in unit sales, while perishables inched up 0.3%, primarily driven by meat, fruit and deli-prepared food gains.
* **Channel shifts:** Club’s share of total food and beverage unit sales has risen to 5.8%, up from 4.7% in 2021. Online sales grew to 4.9% from 2.5% in 2021, while supermarkets’ share declined to 42.1% from 47.3%.
* **Shopping behavior:** Trips rose 3.1% year over year in September, averaging 17.3 grocery visits per household. To manage budgets, consumers purchased fewer items per trip (-1.6%), averaging 8.8 items.
* **Foodservice dynamics:** Restaurant traffic declined 2% in September, according to Placer.ai. Similar to retail, 30% of commercial foodservice traffic over the past 12 months was driven by deals, per Circana. With consumers using digital coupons and loyalty apps, $10 has become the new “sweet spot” for value. Breakfast remains the most economically sensitive daypart, with many consumers skipping or eating at home.
* **Clean label momentum:** More brands and retailers are announcing the removal of select artificial ingredients and additives from their products.

**Inflation Insights**

In September 2025 (the four weeks ending 9/28/2025), the price per unit across all foods and beverages in the Circana MULO+ universe stood at $4.37, up 2.5%. Most categories showed modest but accelerating price growth and some categories like coffee and meat experienced sharper increases. Following a year of minimal price growth, multiple cost drivers, such as product reformulation initiatives, indirect tariff effects, market uncertainty and elevated commodity volatility, are putting pressure on consumer prices.

* Center-store prices averaged $4.12, an increase of 3.3% year-on-year.
* Perishables rose to $4.32 per unit, which was an increase of 2.2% over September 2024.

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| Food & beverages | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | Q3 2024 | Q4 2024 | Q12025 | Q2 2025 | Q3 2025 | Sep2025 |
| PPU | $3.13 | $3.31 | $3.49 | $3.93 | $4.17 | $4.24 | $4.24 | $4.30 | $4.30 | $4.36 | $4.36 | $4.37 |
| Change  | +2.0% | +5.7% | +5.5% | +12.5% | +6.1% | +1.7% | +1.9% | +2.2% | +2.9% | +2.7% | +2.9% | +2.5% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total U.S., MULO+

Inflation across a number of proteins led to an overall increase of 5.4% for meat and poultry prices in September. Fresh meat prices increased far more than processed meat and poultry prices. Despite inflation, meat and poultry continued to enjoy demand growth.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Price inflation (price/volume) | Price/volume | Change vs. YA | Change vs.3YA |
| Total meat (FW and RW) September 2025 | $5.00 | +5.4% | +8.2% |
| Total meat latest 52 weeks | **$4.74** | **+4.1%** | **+8.0%** |
| Fresh meat September 2025 | $4.87 | +6.2% | +11.5% |
|  Fresh meat latest 52 weeks | **$4.63** | **+5.2%** | **+10.5%** |
| Processed meat September 2025 | $5.37 | +3.8% | +2.1% |
|  Processed meat latest 52 weeks | **$5.02** | **+1.8%** | **+3.2%** |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+

Lamb and beef had the highest levels of inflation, but prices increased more than the total store average for all categories with the exception of packaged lunchmeat, smoked ham and processed chicken.

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| September 2025 | Price/lbs | Change vs. YA | Latest 52 weeks | Price/lbs | Change vs. YA |
| Fresh beef | $7.39 | +8.3% | Fresh beef | $7.07 | +6.7% |
| Fresh chicken | $3.21 | +3.0% | Fresh chicken | $3.16 | +3.3% |
| Fresh pork | $3.30 | +4.1% | Fresh pork | $3.23 | +1.2% |
| Fresh turkey | $4.32 | +9.6% | Fresh turkey | $2.66 | -0.6% |
| Fresh lamb | $9.16 | +13.8% | Fresh lamb | $8.39 | +4.3% |
| Fresh exotic | $10.03 | +4.1% | Fresh exotic | $8.52 | -1.4% |
| Bacon | $6.64 | +7.0% | Bacon | $6.28 | +2.3% |
| Packaged lunchmeat | $6.09 | +2.5% | Packaged lunchmeat | $5.99 | +2.1% |
| Dinner sausage | $4.59 | +3.3% | Dinner sausage | $4.50 | +0.9% |
| Frankfurters | $3.84 | +6.3% | Frankfurters | $3.75 | +4.3% |
| Breakfast sausage | $5.03 | +4.3% | Breakfast sausage | $4.83 | +2.2% |
| Smoked ham | $4.00 | +0.6% | Smoked ham | $2.92 | +1.5% |
| Processed chicken | $6.43 | -0.3% | Processed chicken | $6.48 | +0.9% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+

**Meat Sales**

The four-week month of September generated nearly $8.5 billion in meat department sales. This reflects inflationary gains as well as demand-driven growth. Pound sales increased 0.5% in September 2025. This increase was fully driven by fresh meat sales that increased 1.7% in September while processed meat sales were down 2.5%.

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|  | September 2025  | Latest 52 weeks  |
|  | Dollar size | Dollarsvs. YA | Dollars  vs. 2YA | lbs vs. YA | lbs vs. 2YA | Dollarsvs. YA | Dollars  vs. 2YA | lbs vs. YA | lbs vs. 2YA |
| Total meat department | **$8.5B** | **+6.0%** | **+13.0%** | **+0.5%** | **+4.8%** | **+6.6%** | **+10.8%** | **+2.4%** | **+4.1%** |
| Fresh meat | $6.1B | +8.0% | +17.7% | +1.7% | +6.7% | +8.9% | +15.4% | +3.6% | +6.0% |
| Processed meat | $2.4B | +1.2% | +2.6% | -2.5% | -0.1% | +1.3% | +0.9% | -0.5% | -0.6% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+

Meat department sales have been positive since the first quarter of 2023, with increases ranging from 0.3% to 7.3%. In all cases, dollar gains were a combination of inflation and demand growth. While the second quarter of 2025 benefitted from the late Easter timing, September pound sales continued to grow contrary to trends in many other departments across the store.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Dollars | $ vs. YA | Lbs vs. YA |
| September 2025 | **$8.5B** | **+6.0%** | **+0.5%** |
| w.e. 09-07-25 | $2.2B | +5.9% | -0.4% |
| w.e. 09-14-25 | $2.1B | +6.3% | +0.8% |
| w.e. 09-21-25 | $2.1B | +6.8% | +1.8% |
| w.e. 09-28-25 | $2.0B | +4.9% | 0.0% |

All September weeks delivered dollar growth, whereas pound sales were a mix. Pound sales during the first week of September softened, but sales were strong the second and third week.

**Assortment**

The average number of items per store per week is remarkable stable, despite some supply chain challenges across several proteins.

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|  |  | Average meat department items per store selling for … |
|  | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** | **Q2 24** | **Q3 24** | **Q4 24** | **Q1 25** | **Q2 25** | **Q3 25** | **Sep 25** |
| Total meat | 478 | 448 | 448 | 439 | 434 | 428 | 424 | 455 | 450 | 456 | 456 | 454 |
| Change vs. YA | -- | -6.2% | -0.0% | -2.1% | -1.0% | -2.0% | -1.0% | -0.3% | -0.4% | +0.7% | +0.8% | -0.1% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+, average items per store selling

**Fresh Meat Sales by Protein**

Beef’s reign continued, generating $3.4 billion in the four September weeks. This was up by double digits in dollars while pound sales grew 1.9%. Only chicken had higher pound gains in September, at +3.5%. In the full-year view, beef volume sales grew 5.3%, distantly followed by chicken, at 3.1%.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks  |
| Type | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** | **Type** | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Total fresh meat | **$6.1B** | **+8.0%** | **+1.7%** | **Total fresh meat** | **$78.2B** | **+8.9%** | **+3.6%** |
| Fresh beef | $3.4B | +10.4% | +1.9% | Fresh beef | $44.0B | +12.4% | +5.3% |
| Fresh chicken | $1.7B | +6.6% | +3.5% | Fresh chicken | $20.5B | +6.5% | +3.1% |
| Fresh pork | $686M | +3.3% | -0.8% | Fresh pork | $8.7B | +3.3% | +2.1% |
| Fresh turkey | $204M | +2.9% | -6.1% | Fresh turkey | $3.3B | -0.2% | +0.4% |
| Fresh lamb | $68M | +6.5% | -6.4% | Fresh lamb | $975M | +10.3% | +5.8% |
| Fresh exotic | $15M | -1.0% | -4.9% | Fresh exotic | $217M | -4.3% | -2.9% |
| Veal | $3.1M | -9.1% | -15.5% | Veal | $43M | -2.6% | -6.3% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, MULO+

**Processed Meat**

September processed meat sales patterns differed from those seen in the full-year view. For the first time in many months, dinner and breakfast sausage volume sales were down. Sausage did enjoy growth in the frozen department. Packaged lunchmeat sales were down nearly 5.0% year-over-year, while deli meat sales are now lapping the large recall and starting to stabilize.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks |
| Type | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** | **Type** | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Processed meat | **$2.4B** | **+1.2%** | **-2.5%** | **Processed meat** | **$32.1B** | **+1.3%** | **-0.5%** |
| Packaged lunchmeat | $544M | -2.5% | -4.9% | Bacon | $7.1B | +3.2% | +0.9% |
| Bacon | $538M | +3.0% | -3.8% | Packaged lunchmeat  | $7.0B | -0.8% | -2.8% |
| Dinner sausage | $448M | +2.4% | -0.8% | Dinner sausage | $5.8B | +3.4% | +2.5% |
| Frankfurters | $242M | +1.9% | -4.2% | Frankfurters | $3.2B | +2.5% | -1.7% |
| Breakfast sausage | $183M | +3.2% | -1.1% | Breakfast sausage | $2.5B | +4.6% | +2.3% |
| Smoked ham | $72M | -4.4% | -5.0% | Smoked ham | $1.9B | -0.2% | -1.7% |
| Processed chicken | $64M | +0.8% | -1.1% | Processed chicken | $806M | +6.8% | +5.9% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+

**Grinds**Ground beef sales have been extremely strong all year and September was no exception. The four-week period generated $ 1.4 billion in sales, up 13.0% year-on-year. While this is mostly price driven, pounds grew 1.0%. Ground chicken had an impressive 27.8% increase in sales, though off a fairly small base.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks |
| Type | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** | **Type** | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Ground beef | $1.4B | +13.0% | +1.0% | Ground beef | $16.9B | +13.0% | +4.2% |
| Ground turkey | $163M | +5.4% | -3.8% | Ground turkey | $2.0B | +5.3% | +1.8% |
| Ground chicken | $34M | +28.9% | +27.8% | Ground chicken | $391M | +21.5% | +22.2% |
| Ground pork | $18M | +2.8% | +1.8% | Ground pork | $230M | +0.8% | +3.6% |
| Ground lamb | $3.9M | +8.7% | +1.3% | Ground lamb | $59M | +15.8% | +14.6% |
| Ground veal | $0.7M | -6.1% | -9.7% | Ground veal | $10M | +2.9% | +0.7% |

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+

**What’s Next?**

* While unit sales remain on a flat-to-down trajectory, the marketplace continues to show growth for premium and ultra-premium brands along with private-label products. Mainstream items are facing the greatest sales pressure, reflecting consumers’ ongoing willingness to invest in convenience and quality as they reassess spending priorities.
* These patterns are echoed in foodservice, where quick-service restaurants saw a 3% traffic decline in September according to Placer.ai, while full-service restaurants, including fine dining, experienced an increase in traffic.
* Well-being focused consumers have $1.3 trillion in buying power — up 3.7% from last year according to Circana. Seeking to live longer and healthier, Americans are turning to physical and mental wellness, with 70% making self-care a priority. Improved physical health remains the top goal in the U.S., followed by reduced stress and anxiety. Focus, stress relief and productivity are areas of particular interest to Gen Z.
* Healthy eating continues to gain attention, as do nutritional supplements. Consumers are increasingly seeking protein beverages and powders to maximize nutrition through food and drinks, with functional and fortified foods now firmly mainstream. According to Circana, active GLP-1 usage has grown to 5.3% of U.S. adults, while per capita calories have shifted away from alcohol and snacks toward protein.

## **Another Month of All-Around Gains for the Deli Department**

## **Deli Sales**

September brought dollar and unit gains for the deli department across all four areas, including deli meat. Deli meat sales are now lapping the substantial recall that happened in 2024 and is showing signs of recovering lost ground.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks |
|  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Units vs. YA** |  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Units vs. YA** |
| Department deli | **$4.4B** | **+3.5%** | **+2.7%** | **Department deli** | **$57.5B** | **+2.9%** | **+2.3%** |
| Deli cheese | $749M | +5.0% | +3.2% | Deli cheese | $9.9B | +4.3% | +2.6% |
| Deli entertaining | $478M | +1.4% | +0.8% | Deli entertaining | $6.5B | +3.8% | +3.9% |
| Deli meat | $659M | +4.7% | +0.5% | Deli meat | $8.4B | -6.0% | -5.3% |
| Deli prepared | $2.5B | +3.1% | +3.5% | Deli prepared | $32.6B | +4.8% | +3.9% |

Source: Circana, Total US, Integrated Fresh, MULO+, % growth versus year ago

**Deli Meat**

Grab-and-go deli meat sales lead the recovery in deli-meat volume, while pre-sliced and service program continued to lose ground.

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|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks |
| Deli meat | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Total deli meat | **$659M** | **+4.7%** | **+0.4%** | **Deli meat** | **$8.4B** | **-6.0%** | **-5.2%** |
| Grab & go | $231M | +21.3% | +17.7% | Grab & go | $2.6B | -0.8% | +0.4% |
| Pre-sliced | $123M | -2.6% | -2.1% | Pre-sliced | $1.7B | +0.8% | +3.7% |
| Service | $305M | -2.6% | -8.7% | Service | $4.1B | -11.3% | -11.0% |

Source: Circana, Total US, MULO+, Integrated Fresh % growth versus year ago

Deli meat did far better than packaged lunchmeat, which is included in meat department sales. Whereas pound sales had mild growth in deli meat, packaged lunchmeat experienced a decrease of 4.9% year-over-year.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pre-packaged | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks  |
| lunchmeat | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Packaged lunchmeat | $544M | -2.5% | -4.9% | Packaged lunchmeat | $7.0B | -0.8% | -2.8% |

Source: Circana, Total US, MULO+, Integrated Fresh % growth versus year ago

**Deli Cheese**

Cheese sales continued to win across the store and across all deli formats. Pre-sliced cheese sales gained 7.1% year-over-year, while specialty cheese sales grew 5.5% to reach $521 million. Specialty cheese is closing in on becoming a $7.0 billion category on an annual basis.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks  |
| Deli cheese | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Total deli cheese | **$749M** | **+5.0%** | **+4.5%** | **Deli cheese** | **$9.9B** | **+4.3%** | **+4.2%** |
| Grab & go | $92M | +3.8% | +1.0% | Grab & go | $1.2B | -0.1% | -0.8% |
| Pre-sliced | $52M | +4.0% | +7.1% | Pre-sliced | $729M | +2.5% | +1.8% |
| Service | $78M | +4.2% | +0.5% | Service | $1.0B | -4.2% | -4.4% |
| Specialty | $521M | +5.6% | +5.5% | Specialty | $6.9B | +7.0% | +7.0% |

Source: Circana, Total US, MULO+, Integrated Fresh

**Deli Entertaining**

In deli entertaining, only trays continued to grow in dollars and pounds. Dips and sauces managed a small increase in dollar sales, but this was price-driven.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks |
| Deli entertaining | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Lbs vs. YA** |
| Deli entertaining | **$478M** | **+1.4%** | **-1.4%** | **Deli entertaining** | **$6.5B** | **+3.8%** | **+1.4%** |
| Dips and sauces | $249M | +1.1% | -1.1% | Dips and sauces | $3.4B | +3.2% | +0.1% |
| Trays  | $89M | +6.0% | +5.5% | Trays | $1.2B | +6.9% | +7.1% |
| Spreads | $81M | -1.1% | -1.5% | Spreads | $1.1B | -1.7% | -3.1% |
| Pickles/relish | $59M | -0.2% | -4.6% | Pickles/relish | $822M | +10.0% | +7.7% |

Source: Circana, Total US, MULO+, Integrated Fresh, % increase versus same period year ago, deli prepared foods including both fixed and random weight, includes known deli products

**Deli Prepared**

Deli-prepared food sales enjoyed demand growth as consumers continued to shift dollars and trips from restaurants to retail. Virtually all categories showed growth, led by soups and chili, though that is a smaller category. Entrees, led by sushi, were the top category, closing in on $700 million in monthly sales. Prepared meat growth is slowing but remained in the plus, while salad sales continued to heat up. This is contrary to packaged salad and lettuce sales in the produce department.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | September 2025 |  | Latest 52 weeks |
| Deli prepared | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Units vs. YA** |  | **$ sales** | **$ vs. YA** | **Units vs. YA** |
| Deli prepared | **$2.5B** | **+3.1%** | **+3.5%** | **Deli prepared** | **$32.6B** | **+4.8%** | **+3.9%** |
| Entrees | $695M | +3.9% | +2.5% | Entrees | $8.9B | +5.4% | +3.7% |
| Prepared meats | $497M | 0.0% | +2.4% | Prepared meats | $6.4B | +3.8% | +4,7% |
| Salads | $419M | +5.6% | +5.9% | Salads | $5.4B | +6.8% | +7.0% |
| Sandwiches | $306M | +2.5% | +4.5% | Sandwiches | $3.9B | +2.3% | -1.4% |
| Appetizers  | $179M | +8.2% | +7.2% | Side dishes | $2.3B | +4.2% | +5.5% |
| Side dishes | $169M | -1.2% | +0.5% | Appetizers | $2.2B | +7.9% | +6.4% |
| Soups & chili | $113M | +9.3% | +11.0% | Soups & chili | $1.4B | +8.1% | +6.1% |
| Pizza | $92M | +1.4% | -2.0% | Pizza | $1.2B | +4.7% | -0.1% |
| Breakfast | $42M | -3.1% | -6.9% | Breakfast | $565M | -2.6% | -6.7% |
| Combo meals | $16M | +2.5% | +3.3% | Combo meals | $209M | +2.4% | +4.5% |
| Desserts | $5.9M | -15.5% | -11.3% | Desserts | $87M | -14.5% | -14.5% |

Source: Circana, Total US, MULO+, Integrated Fresh, % increase versus same period year ago, deli prepared foods including both fixed and random weight.

**Date ranges:**

2024: 52 weeks ending 12/29/2024

Q1 2025: 13 weeks ending 3/30/2025

Q2 2025: 13 weeks ending 6/29/2025

Q3 2025: 13 weeks ending 9/28/2025

September 2025: 4 weeks ending 9/28/2025