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IN FOCUS

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U.S. Egg Production and Retail Prices

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. national average retail price of eggs per dozen hit an all-time high of $6.23 in March 2025 (**Figure 1**). Experts attribute this in part to an outbreak of a highly contagious and deadly viral disease in domestic poultry flocks that has resulted in the loss of millions of birds since 2022. Fewer birds means fewer eggs, a staple food in the American diet with an estimated per capita consumption of 274 eggs in 2024. In response to these record high prices, some consumers have illegally attempted to bring eggs across the southern U.S. border or "rented" their own backyard chicken flocks. Reports such as these, and those of some retailers placing limits on egg purchases or certain restaurants adding per-egg surcharges to cover rising food prices, have led to congressional interest in the egg supply chain. Further, the Secretary of Agriculture announced a "five-pronged approach to address avian flu" in February 2025 "to deliver affordable eggs." This In Focus summarizes the state of the U.S. egg-laying flock, production and price data from federal agencies, and policy issues of potential interest to Congress.

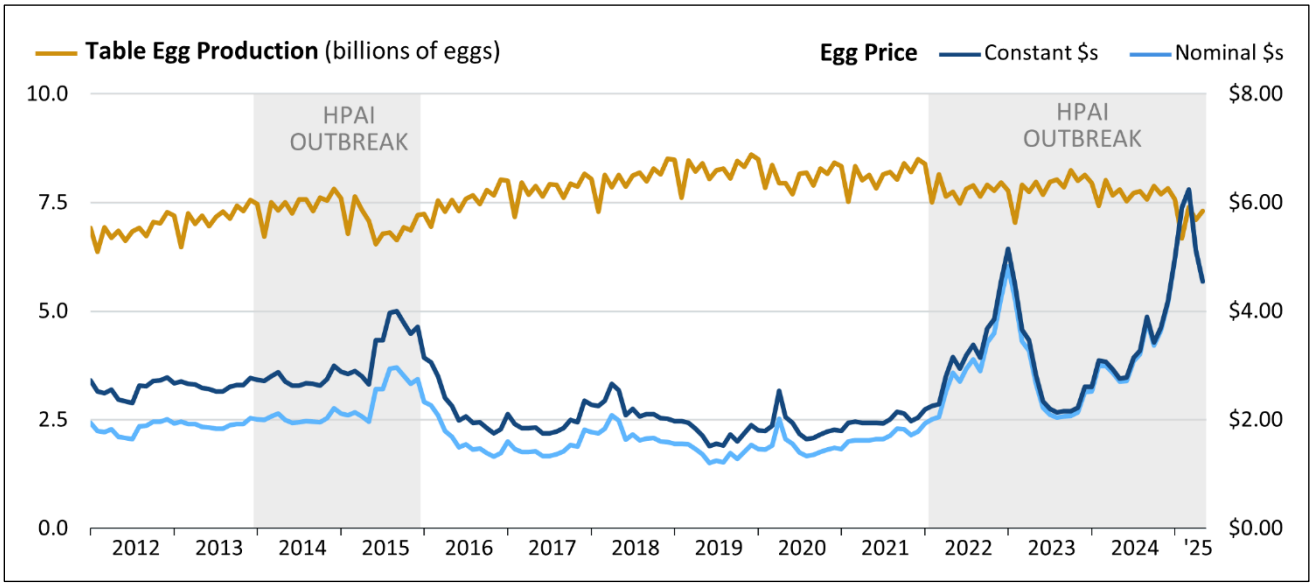
State of the U.S. Poultry Sector

The H5N1 strain of *highly pathogenic avian influenza* (HPAI) has been affecting U.S. poultry flocks since February 2022. H5N1 is a virulent strain of avian influenza with a mortality rate in chickens that can reach as high as 100%. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) tracks flock infections; as of May 28, 2025, 1,704 flocks had been confirmed as HPAI positive, affecting 173 million birds since February 2022. Cases have occurred in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. The United States' primary control and eradication strategy for HPAI in domestic poultry is "stamping-out," a strategy defined by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) that requires euthanasia or "depopulation" of the entire flock upon confirmation of HPAI infection in a single bird, followed by appropriate disposal of carcasses and decontamination of the areas that sick animals had come in contact with thorough cleaning and disinfection. APHIS provides indemnity payments to producers who must depopulate their flock because of HPAI infection. In March 2025, USDA increased the indemnity rate for layer hens from about $7 to nearly $17 per lost bird.

Among all U.S. poultry flocks, table-egg-laying hens are currently the most affected, accounting for 75% of domestic poultry loss. One factor is that laying hens have longer lifespans than other birds. Fewer such hens results in a decrease in egg supply, which may increase retail prices.

Figure 1. Table Egg Production and U.S. Retail Egg Prices (per Dozen), January 2012-May 2025

Figure is interactive in HTML version of product.



Source: CRS. Data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Quick Stats database, "Eggs, Table–Production," and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Consumer Price Index Average Data for dozen large eggs; adjusted for inflation (2025 dollars) using BLS Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers.

For example, the average national population of table-egg-laying hens decreased 4.8% during the 2014-2015 HPAI outbreak, according to CRS calculations using National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) data, and U.S. retail egg prices increased by approximately 50 cents per dozen (**Figure 1**). The average number of table-egg-laying hens was 5.3% less in 2024 than 2021, and U.S. retail egg prices rose from an average of $1.97 in 2021 to $3.24 per dozen in 2024, in inflation-adjusted 2025 dollars. In 2025, retail egg prices, per dozen, decreased from $6.23 in March to $5.12 in April following a decrease in wholesale egg prices, the price paid by volume buyers, from a monthly average of $5.33 per dozen in March to $3.74 per dozen in April. In May 2025, the reported retail price of eggs decreased again to $4.55 per dozen.

Egg Production and Price Reports

Table 1 summarizes egg-related economic reports published by federal agencies that inform marketing and buying decisions, and may be useful in policymaking.

Table 1. Egg Production and Prices Reported by Federal Agencies

Agency	Report Name	Reported Figures
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), USDA	Market News reports, various	Wholesale and retailer price, egg inventory, demand indicators, and more
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)	Consumer Price Index (CPI)	Retail price of dozen carton of shell eggs
Economic Research Service (ERS), USDA	Monthly Commodity Outlook reports and data, various	WASDE report analysis, producer returns, price spreads, and more
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), USDA	Chickens and Eggs report; Quick Stats database	Bird inventory, shell egg and egg products production, and cold storage inventory
World Agricultural Outlook Board, USDA	World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report	Annual forecast for egg supply and use, prices paid by New York volume buyers for Grade A eggs

Source: CRS.

Issues for Congress

Effects of the ongoing HPAI outbreak may continue to put downward pressure on U.S. table egg supplies and upward pressure on consumer retail prices for *shell eggs* and egg products. Issues of potential congressional interest include preventing HPAI though vaccination, increasing egg supply, and examining competition in the poultry sector.

Develop Vaccination Strategy

A few U.S.-licensed vaccines exist for certain HPAI virus subtypes, but none match the strain of the current poultry outbreak. Vaccines effective against HPAI that can be easily administered to an entire flock, such as through the feed or drinking water supply, are not yet available. A bill (H.R. 2868) introduced in the 119th Congress would add HPAI vaccines as a USDA high-priority research area. In accordance with WOAH international standards, the use of vaccination does not affect a country's HPAI-free status if surveillance supports the absence of infection. However, individual trading partners may decide not to accept U.S. poultry products because of the possibility of viral shedding in healthy-looking birds. One option to possibly mitigate such action by trading partners is to direct the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to preemptively negotiate agreements with major U.S. trading partners to help ensure continuity of trade. The Avian Flu Vaccination Strategy Act (S. 908) would require the Secretary of Agriculture and USTR to develop a vaccination strategy for poultry.

Increase Domestically Available Egg Supply

Increasing the egg supply in retail stores may reduce prices. Unlike shell eggs, *hatching* eggs produce broiler chickens and are not produced for consumption. The National Chicken Council (NCC) petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2023, and again in 2025, to allow surplus hatching eggs produced by the broiler industry to be sold to processors for use in egg-based products. NCC claims that this action would release almost 400 million eggs annually into the supply for processed egg products, sparing the use of shell eggs for that purpose. A bill (H.R. 2222) introduced in the 119th Congress would require FDA to allow for this use of hatching eggs by revising a 2009 final rule related to the prevention of *Salmonella* contamination in table eggs. The Secretary of Agriculture intends to explore importing eggs and decreasing exports. The perishability and fragility of shell eggs, however, may render them difficult to transport internationally. Further, the United States imposes food safety standards—such as requirements to wash shell eggs—that other countries may not adhere to. Despite these complexities, the United States imported 218 million shell eggs in January-March 2025, a 2,040% increase over January-March 2024. A portion of 2025 imports came from countries that had never exported table eggs to the United States, such as Brazil.

Evaluate Competition in the Egg Sector

The relatively sharp rise from November 2024 through March 2025 in retail egg prices (**Figure 1**), raised questions among policymakers about the egg sector. Some Members of Congress stated that "[e]gg producers and grocery stores may leverage the current avian flu outbreak as an opportunity to further constrain supply or hike up egg prices to increase profits." In April 2025, the largest U.S. egg producer reported a 247% increase in quarterly net income from the same period in 2024, announced its acquisition of an egg processing company, and confirmed reports that the Department of Justice's Antitrust Division is investigating the causes behind nationwide increases in egg prices. A bill (S. 1904) introduced in the 119th Congress would restrict indemnified large egg producers from issuing dividends to stockholders or repurchasing their own stock for two years after receiving payment for HPAI-related losses. Congress may consider examining consolidation and/or anticompetitive behavior, such as price-fixing, in the agriculture and food industries.

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