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HUMAN RESOURCES & PAYROLL

The Cost of an All-American 4th of July Cookout Increases

A cookout of Americans' favorite foods for the Fourth of July will cost slightly more this year but still comes in at less than \$6 per person, says the American Farm Bureau Federation.

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Farm Bureau's informal survey reveals the average cost of a summer cookout for 10 people is \$56.06, or \$5.61 per person (<http://bit.ly/28Y80fF>).

Although the cost for the cookout is up, "Prices in the meat case are starting to look better from the consumers' perspective," said Veronica Nigh, an AFBF economist. "Retail ground round prices are trending lower," she noted, pointing to the nation's cattle inventory and commercial beef production, which continue to rebound from dramatically low levels in 2014 and 2015.

"On the pork side, commercial production also continues to grow and is at the highest level in 25 years," Nigh said. Spare rib prices are about the same as a year ago, while the amount of product in cold storage is up 121 percent. "This is helping mediate the normal seasonal upswing in spare rib prices we typically see around the July 4th festivities," she said.

AFBF's summer cookout menu for 10 people consists of hot dogs and cheeseburgers with buns, pork spare ribs, deli potato salad, baked beans, corn chips, lemonade, chocolate milk, ketchup, mustard and watermelon.

Commenting on the slight increase in watermelon prices, Nigh said, "Shipments of watermelons are down nearly 8 percent compared to the same time period last year."

U.S. milk production is up 1 percent compared to the same period last year. During the first quarter of 2016 (January-March), U.S. milk production reached historic levels, putting significant downward pressure on the price farmers receive for their milk.

A total of 79 Farm Bureau members (volunteer shoppers) in 26 states checked retail prices for summer cookout foods at their local grocery stores for this informal survey.

The summer cookout survey is part of the Farm Bureau marketbasket series, which also includes the popular annual Thanksgiving Dinner Cost Survey and two additional surveys of common food staples Americans use to prepare meals at home.

AFBF is the nation's largest general farm organization with member families in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Learn more at <http://facebook.com/AmericanFarmBureau> or follow @FarmBureau on Twitter.

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