

## Viewpoint

What do a hundred 2½ pound Chickens weigh? 275 pounds, of course  
*Dining Insights*, Winter 2011

**T**he recent upsurge in commodity prices has brought to mind the fact that not all food cost increases are reflected in the Consumer Price Index.

**That, in turn,** reminded me of a conversation I had when I was running T J Mac Dermott Corp., a food service company, with Buddy Cunningham, our long-time meat supplier. We had always ordered 2½ pound chickens, quartered, for dinner meals.

“Buddy, the last few orders of chickens weighed an average of 2¾ pounds.”

“That’s how 2½ pound chickens come now.”

“Then, how do I get 2½ pounders?”

“Order 2¼ pounders.”

“Okay, send me a hundred 2¼ pound chickens, quartered.”

“We don’t have any.”

**So the price** of chickens hadn’t risen, but the cost of a meal went up 10 percent.

The same thing happened to the once-standard 11-pound pork loin. It became 12½ pounds. “They’re letting the hogs grow bigger,” Buddy explained. The cost of pork chops went up 13 percent without a penny of price increase.

**Tomatoes has always** come in a 30-pound “lug,” six rows of seven tomatoes in each of three layers, or six rows of six larger tomatoes. If you wanted *really* big tomatoes, you ordered 6x5s, but they all came 30 pounds to the box.

Then the size of the box was reduced to 25 pounds because, Charlie Frey, our produce purveyor, explained, the 30-pound box bulged on the top and resulted in too many bruised and crushed tomatoes. This they discovered after using 30-pound lugs for nearly a century. In time, the 25-pound box was reduced to the 20-pound box used today.

**Of course,** you can’t buy what nobody sells, but there still are ways to fight the invisible inflation. A vendor is a seller, not a partner. Select companies you find are trustworthy, not necessarily the most friendly. Don’t accept more product than you’d ordered, a common ploy. If you need 50 pounds of beef, order 45 pounds. Chances are you’ll get 50 pounds, instead of the 53-55 pounds you’d get if you ordered 50.

That’s food cost inflation, whether it shows up on the CPI or not.

- Tom Mac Dermott