The reasons:

1. Less beef in the US due to drought/weather.
2. We are exporting more beef and increasing imports of more lower quality beef to be made into ground beef.
3. The drought from 2 years ago forced a lot of farmers to sell their herds due to lack of foodstuffs, and they are not replenished due to the current high demand.

The list goes on…

The national average for ground beef is currently $5.39 lb. Prices are not looking to scale back until 2015. A good steak hasn’t cost this much in America since Ronald Reagan was president. A dwindling number of cattle and the growing export demand from countries such as China and Japan have caused the average retail cost of fresh beef to climb to $5.28 lb. in February, up almost a quarter from January and the highest price since 1987.

“Everything that’s produced is being consumed,” says Kevin Good, an analyst at CattleFax, a Colorado-based information group, “and prices likely will stay high for a couple of years as cattle producers start to rebuild their herds amid big questions about whether the Southwest and parts of the Midwest will see enough rain to replenish pastures.”

Consider that from the time that a bull meets a cow in the pasture until producers get a T-bone out of the deal is two full years. And the market is still reeling from the 2009 and 2011 drought. During the depths of the drought, Texas ranchers dumped their cattle into slaughterhouses. So for the past couple of years, fewer cows have given birth to fewer calves, interrupting what’s is usually a steady supply of cattle.
But while meat prices are on the rise, it would be wise to stop and comparison shop the nutrient value of some popular food purchases in comparison to a pound of ground beef. I recently went to the local grocery store and collected prices on several items for current pricing. I converted the pound price for the following products to a per ounce price for easier comparison. I used the $5.39 per pound price for ground beef.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Price/oz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ground Beef</td>
<td>$0.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utz Potato Chips</td>
<td>$0.452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jif Peanut Butter</td>
<td>$0.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snicker Bites</td>
<td>$0.499</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local beef supplies are still in good supply and a great food dollar value. Maryland farm-raised beef can be found at farmers' markets, purchased directly from farmers’ having their meat processed and sold from their farm, or from local retailers that partners with local producers to put Maryland farm-raised meats in their freezer cases.

CHECKOUT SUPPLIER LISTINGS THROUGH:

- The Maryland Niche Meats & Poultry Producers Directory

- Maryland’s Best
  [http://marylandsbest.net/](http://marylandsbest.net/)

- Southern Maryland Meats

- The Amazing Grazing Directory, Future Harvest-CASA