

Buying Locally Produced Meat

Betsy Hodge, Livestock Educator
CCE St. Lawrence County

Why purchase local meat? You will be supporting your neighbors in the North Country and the businesses they purchase supplies from. You can ask and find out how the animal was raised. Most locally raised animals are not bought and sold at auctions, are raised with their mothers and have access to the outside. Most have access to pasture at the right time of year and are not given hormones or medicines unless it is because the animal needs them. Most farmers that sell meat also eat it themselves.

Background – Locally raised meat is not normally raised in large feedlots. The breeds may vary in size and type. Many local farmers use heritage breeds that are known for their pasturing or hardiness. Some of these can take a little longer to grow and may be leaner or fatter than those you find at the grocery store. They may also be modern breeds that are raised on local forages and supplemented with grain. It can be anywhere in the middle. Many local farmers feed their animals by using pasture or forage they grow and then using grains and by-products to meet the animals' nutritional needs as it grows.

Beef animals usually take 18-24 months to be finished. Hogs are ready in four to seven months. Lambs can be ready in four months to a year depending on the style of management. Many farm animals are born in the spring and are ready in the fall and early winter. You need to plan ahead to buy local meat. Contact a farmer and let them know what you are looking for so they can reserve you an animal. Many farmers will also refer you to someone they know with animals that are ready when you want them.

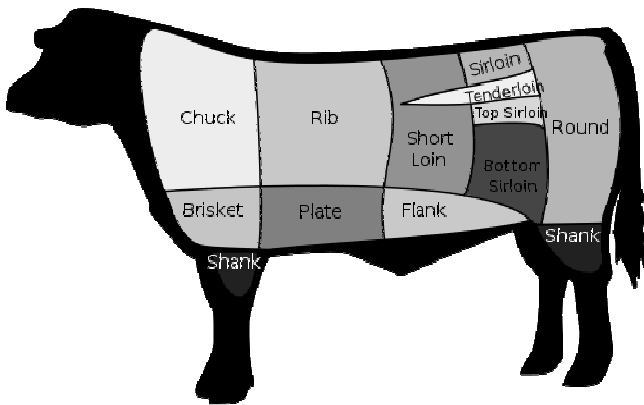
USDA Processing – If you purchase an animal for your own use it does not have to be slaughtered at an USDA slaughter and processing facility. If you plan to sell any of the meat or if you are buying retail cuts of meat the animals have to be slaughtered and processed at a USDA facility. A federal inspector looks at the carcass at a USDA plant and determines the health of the animal. USDA plants do a lot of testing and follow specific procedures for cleaning and sanitizing. USDA retail cuts will have the address of the farmer, processor and maybe the distributor if that is different, as well as safe handling information.

How do you find locally raised meat? – You can contact a farmer directly and buy whole/half animals “live”. The farmer will usually drop the animal off at the slaughterhouse and you pick it up (usually frozen) when it is ready and pay for the processing. You will pay the farmer for the animal separately. Talk to the farmer and figure out how you will pay for it (by the pound live weight, hanging weight), who pays for processing, and who will pick it up. You can also buy local meats by the cut at farmers' markets, through a CSA, at small retailers like the Potsdam Food Co-op, restaurants, butcher shops, and at processing facilities such as Tri-Town and Willards.

Have you ever wondered if the meat you are picking up from the processor will fit into the freezer when you get home? A good rule of thumb is that 50 pounds of meat will fit into 2.25 cubic feet of freezer/cooler space. So let's say you have a 12 cubic foot chest freezer...that should hold about 250 lbs of meat. They recommend that you keep it at -5 to -10° F to keep the meat really fresh. It is best if you can get it frozen by the processor and then bring it home and put it in the freezer. Putting a large amount of unfrozen meat in the home freezer will cause it to freeze slowly which is bad for meat quality.

Here's a list of what you can expect from a half of a 1000-1200 lb live beef animal:

Meat from a typical 1000-1200 lb live animal (cuts are ¾ " thick)



14 ¾ "T-bone	8 sirloin
2 sirloin tip roasts	4 arm roasts (3 lbs)
8 packages of stew meat (1 lb)	14 rib steaks
4 packages of soup bones	8 round steaks
6 chuck roasts (4 lbs)	2 rump roasts (3 lbs)
4 packages of short ribs (1.5 lbs)	
80-100 lbs of ground beef	
Tongue, heart, liver, tail, etc	

Aging or hanging the carcass means the time it hangs in the cooler before cutting into retail cuts. Most beef cattle are hung for 7 to 10 days. Hanging improves the flavor, tenderness and actually makes it lose weight (dehydrates). In Europe where most of the beef is older and grass-fed and therefore very lean they often hang carcasses for a month! They cover them with wax or clothes to help slow the dehydration. Most processors do not have enough cooler space to hang carcasses longer than the standard week.

How do you know how much actual meat you will get when you send a steer to the processor? The live weight refers to the weight you get when you put a live animal on the scale. The dressed weight – also known as the hanging weight or the carcass weight – is what you get when you remove the parts that aren't edible like the hide, feet, head, some of the bones and most of the innards. The dressing percentage for most beef cattle is about 61% and for dairy steers about 59%. So a 1200 lb animal would dress about 732 lbs.

Is that how much you would bring home? No. You would only bring home the finished cuts or the finished cut weight. **The finished cut weight as a percentage of the live weight will range from about 38% to 43% so a whole 1200 lb steer will yield 491 to 516 actual pounds of meat cuts.**

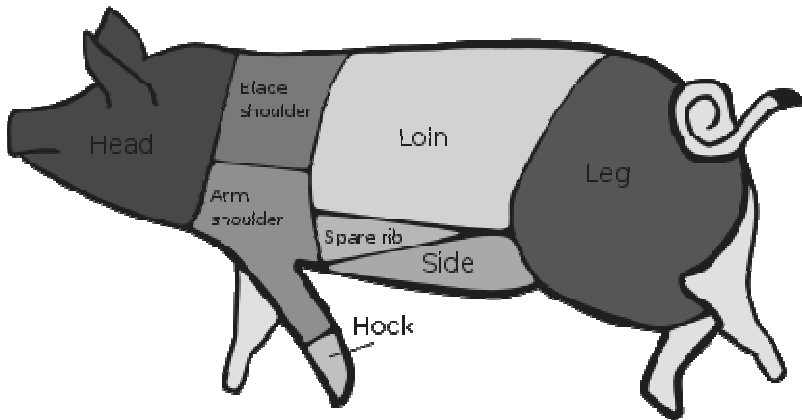
Several things affect dressing percentage and carcass cutting yield. Dressing percentage is affected by gut fill since the weight of the stomach contents is included in the live weight. A full digestive tract gives a lower dressing percentage. An animal with more fat and more muscle will dress higher. An animal with a lot of mud on the hide will dress at a lower percentage because the hide will be heavy.

Fatter and heavily muscled animals have a higher cut carcass yield as well although the amount of cover fat left on the cuts can make a difference in the percentage. The number of boneless cuts can change the percentage also. Bones are heavy and removing them does not change the amount of meat available but it does change the percentage.

Hog Data – Hogs have a higher yield of usable meat. Hogs will yield between 47% and 53% of the live weight (or about 74% of the carcass weight). A 225 hog will yield 162 pound hanging carcass (dressed weight) and about 120 pounds of meat. Hogs

Here's what you can expect from a half of a 225 pound hog.

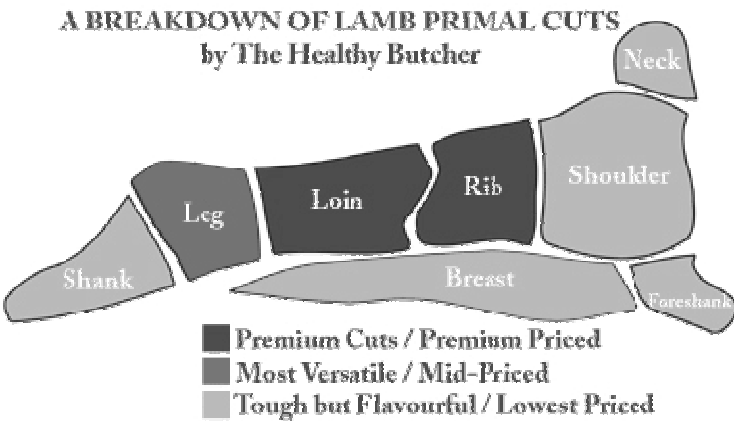
Some typical cuts are:



- 12 pounds of pork chops
- 6-8 pounds of ground pork or sausage
- 2 packages of spare ribs (1.5 lbs)
- 1 ham (15-17 pounds – can be cut in half)
- 3 shoulder roasts (can be steaks)
- 8 lbs of bacon
- 2 smoked hocks
- Lard, heart, liver, tongue, etc.

Lamb Data – Lambs are smaller and well suited for fitting into family freezers and smaller family meals. Lambs generally have about a 50% yield for the carcass weight and then about a 75% yield of meat from that carcass or about **34 pounds of meat from a whole 90 pound lamb**. Many people are surprised at how small the chops are. Our lambs are smaller in general than the lambs used for processing for the grocery stores (ours are about 90-100 pounds live and the western lambs can be 140 pounds). The number of chops and steaks varies depending on the thickness you want. A larger framed lamb will yield bigger cuts.

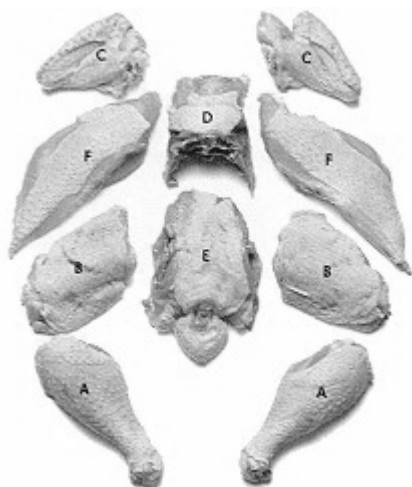
Here is what you can expect from a whole 90 pound lamb:



- 16 shoulder chops (or you could have shoulder roasts)
- 16 small lamb chops
- 16 small loin chops (usually packaged 4 chops together)
- 2 foreshanks
- 2 hindshanks
- 2 packages of riblets (good in stew)
- 2 bone-in leg roasts (5 to 6 pounds each)(many people have these cut in half or make leg steaks)
- (2-4) packages of meaty neck slices for stock or stew
- Organ Meats, stew meat or ground lamb, also can make sausage if you are doing several lambs and have enough ground meat.

What about Poultry? There is a big demand for local chicken and turkey and not enough supply. Local growers can grow and process a certain number of birds themselves for retail sale. Ask at the farmer's markets and watch the bulletin boards at the food co-ops and health food stores for local sources. There is interest in growing more poultry for local consumption. Local poultry ends up being quite a bit more expensive than your grocery store birds because the chickens and turkeys are raised in smaller batches with more space and without the economies of scale that the huge poultry companies have.

The picture shows a whole chicken cut in 10 pieces:



- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Legsb. Thighsc. Wingsd. Part of back portione. Tail end of back portionf. Breasts |
|---|

Some good references and sources of information:

www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/PM2076.pdf

This publication is a great summary of all things beef and pork. It has the cuts and how best to use them, lots of facts on different labels, how much to expect, and more.

www.lambrecipes.org

Lamb and other recipes in an organized offering

www.recipetips.com

Under "Cooling tips, Advice, and Glossary" click on lamb, beef or pork for some great information on cuts and how to cook them- Good recipes and all kinds of tips for good eating

www.adirondackharvest.com

A great website with many farmers listed - a good way to make connections in different parts of the Adirondack region. Farmers' markets are all listed too.

www.gardenshare.org

Gardenshare's website lists CSAs in the area and other interesting local food news.

www.gourmetsleuth.com – good article on how to cut up a chicken

Cornell Cooperative Extension – CCE has offices in every county of NY State. Local educators can help you connect with farmers as well as direct you to other educational material related to local foods and eating healthy. The main website is <http://cce.cornell.edu>. You can find your way to the local offices' websites and phone numbers.