

Consumers: Want to Buy an Animal and Have it Butchered for Home Use?

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There are many things to consider whether you are a meat consumer considering purchasing a live animal that will be butchered for home use; or a livestock producer wanting to sell animals directly to consumers for home meat consumption. Both the buyer and seller should educate themselves on the access to getting an animal harvested, the cost associated, the retail cuts received and the amount of product one can expect as well as the storage (freezer space) needs for a single animal/carcass. Further, depending on the harvest (custom or USDA inspected) avenue you choose or have access to, there may be opportunities or limitations to market channels.

Things Consumers should Consider Prior to Purchasing an Animal:

- 1) Make sure that you have a harvest date scheduled before you purchase an animal. It is becoming more difficult to secure a harvest date for locally processed animals because of a limited number of local butchers and increased demand for locally grown meat. And if you are wanting to sell part of the meat, in Washington State, there are federal, state and county laws concerning these transactions.
- 2) Just like in the commercial industry, freezers and freezer space is limited. To ensure the proper storage of your investment, make sure you have a good working freezer with adequate space for the animal you are purchasing. In addition to the size of the animal, the amount of bone-in versus bone-out (ground products like hamburger or sausage) will impact the pounds of meat you take home and freezer space.
- 3) Understand the cost associated with having an animal harvested for home use. Beef cattle, in particular, can be a large initial investment since they can weigh between 1350-1500 pounds. In addition to the cost of the animal (typically sold to an individual live prior to harvest), individuals will also be charged a per animal harvest (butcher) fee, and a cut/wrap fee (based on the animal's hanging hot carcass weight). Further processing such as curing (ham/bacon/pastrami/corned beef/ etc.) and/or value-added processing (sausage, packaging type and size, etc.) will result in additional costs.
- 4) Your contracted butcher will ask for any special instructions beyond the standard for harvesting and processing. This will be your opportunity to identify the roast, steaks, chops, cutlets, ground product, etc., that you want and the size or portions, as well as the thickness (i.e., steaks cut to 1.25 inches) and how many items or portions per package. Additional work in the butchering process for cut and wrap will result in a higher price, as added work will be necessary in most cases. Reviewing what initial options your butcher has available to choose from will be key to understanding any added meat cutting instructions (de-boning and grind) will affect the poundage of take-home product and as mentioned the price per-pound. It is paramount to understand how much you can get from one animal; there is only so many T-bone steaks on each steer; a lamb might have 4 legs but you can only get two "legs of lamb" out of each sheep; and traditional bacon like you buy from the grocery store only comes from the belly of the pig (expect about 15-pounds of bacon from a 285-pound market pig). You will also want to consider your family's cooking and eating preferences when choosing cuts and package sizes.

- 5) Online resources provided by producer and commodity groups are available for creative and innovative recipes for meats from our livestock checkoff programs at www.wabeef.org, www.pork.org, and www.americanlamb.com. Go to the Washington State Beef Commission at <https://www.wabeef.org/> for more information on beef nutrition, meat cuts, cooking instruction of specific meat cuts and great beef recipes.

Market Beef Example:

Quick Facts: Harvesting a Beef Animal for Home Consumption

- Most market-ready beef cattle are raised to be market ready for optimal meat quality between 16-22 months of age, or between 1300-1500 pounds (steer). However, females, smaller breeds, or dairy-influenced cattle can be market ready at lighter live weights, and lower dressing percentages, resulting in less retail product. Grass-fed cattle typically weigh less at harvest and have lower dressing percentages compared to grain-fed animals. Additionally, with elevated levels of beta-carotene or Vitamin A from the grass diet, the fat of grass-fed beef may be more yellow in appearance. Grain-finished cattle will result in a brighter and whiter fat. The difference in fat color, if age of animal and management conditions are the same, will not impact food safety or product quality. The amount of fat present and the amount of marbling will impact flavor and tenderness. These are the reasons that cattle which are grain-fed are typically preferred from a tenderness and flavor standpoint.
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- When harvested, market ready beef steers (1300-1500 pounds) will typically dress between 60-64%; meaning that the hanging carcass weight will be between 750-950 pounds. Fatter animals or those with more muscle will typically have a higher dressing percentage. While those with more fill in their stomach, a heavier hide, horned or those animals that are lighter muscled will have a lower dressing percentage. Dressing percentage reflects only that portion of the carcass that hangs on the rail after it is butchered. The dressing percentage of animals that are on full feed when weighed can be as low as 56-58% of the live weight. The hanging weight of a carcass is the weight that is typically used to calculate the cut and wrap fee.
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- A hanging beef carcass will typically yield 55-60% of mostly bone-in meat, resulting in approximately 415-575 pounds of meat to take home. However, if you have more cuts made into boneless products or more grind done for hamburger, the hanging carcass will yield about 50-55% boneless meat cuts, resulting in about 375-525 pounds of take-home meat. Basically, the more fat trimmed and the more bone taken out of the meat cuts, the less pounds of meat you will take-home. However,
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remember it is essentially the same amount of total edible meat. This is due to the difference is how the meat was cut, processed, and packaged (with the bones removed at the butcher shop), versus at home prior to cooking or eating. This could result in a higher processing fee as this extra work results in more labor cost. The pounds of take-home meat will be less than the hanging weight used to calculate the cut and wrap cost. A skilled butcher will be able to assist you in deciding what meat cuts are available from specific portions of the carcass (Round, Loin, etc.).

- Most freezers will hold approximately 35-40 pounds of meat per cubic foot.

Example of the different meat cuts and weights from a market ready steer. This is an example of a trim, high-yielding beef animal.



Market Pig Example:

Quick Facts: Harvesting a Pig for Home Consumption

- Most market ready pigs are raised to be market ready for optimal meat quality between 5-7 months of age, or between 275-325 pounds. Female pigs are typically leaner than barrows (castrated males). Males not castrated or improperly castrated will likely have an off flavor, called boar taint, which can be a very offensive taste for many consumers. Pigs also need to be fat enough to make high quality bacon that will meet the expectations of the consumer. You will want a pig in the identified weight range that has at least 0.7 inches of back fat (measured at the 10th rib) so that the belly wall thickness used to make traditional bacon is at least 1.0 inches in thickness. This will result in extra fat trim from some cuts, but will yield higher quality bacon and better marbled pork chops.



- When harvested, market-ready pigs (275-325 pounds) will typically dress between 70-72% with the skin-on and the head-off; yielding a hanging carcass weight between 190-235 pounds. The more muscle or the fatter an animal is, the higher the dressing percentage will be. Also, the dirtier an animal arrives to butcher, the more fill in the animal's stomach at harvest, or with less muscle, will result in a lower dressing percentage. Dressing percentage reflects only that portion of the carcass that hangs on the rail after it is butchered. If animals are on full feed when weighed live, the dressing percentage can be as low as 68%. The dressing percentage will be higher for pigs that have the skin left on the carcass. The skin is approximately 6% of the carcass weight. Some facilities will also leave the head on which will increase the hanging weight by approximately 6%. The hanging weight of a carcass is the weight that is typically used to calculate the cut and wrap fee.



- A hanging pork carcass will typically yield about 75% of mostly bone-in meat cuts, resulting in approximately 140-175 pounds of meat to take home. However, if you have more cuts made into boneless products, or more grind done for sausage or cured/smoked products, the hanging carcass will yield about 65-70% boneless cured meat cuts (125-165 pounds of take-home meat). Basically, the more fat trimmed, the more bone taken out of the meat cuts, or pork cuts that are cured or smoked will yield less take-home product. However, remember it is essentially the same amount of total edible meat. The difference is how the meat was cut and packaged (with the bones removed at the butcher shop), versus when you prepare and cook the product at home. Further processing also adds value and engages you in a pleasurable eating experience that may also result in less preparation time. The pounds of take-home meat will be less than the hanging weight used to calculate the cut and wrap cost. A skilled butcher will be able to assist you in deciding what meat cuts are available from specific portions of the carcass (Shoulder, Belly, etc.).
- Most freezers will hold approximately 35-40 pounds of meat per cubic foot.

Example of the different meats cuts and weights from a market-ready pig. This is an example of a trim, high-yielding animal.

“Take Home” Meat from a 250-pound Market Hog
Hot Carcass Weight after harvest- 171.0 pounds
Harvested with the Skin Removed (Skin Off)
“Take Home” product- 152.2 pounds of pork (89.0% of Hot Carcass Weight)

Country Ribs- 11.2 lbs
Pork Chops- 28.5 lbs
Sirloin Roast-9.2 lbs
Shoulder Steaks- 8.6 lbs
Spare Ribs- 4.5 lbs
Smoked Bacon- 19.1 lbs
Smoked Ham/Ham Steaks- 37.4 lbs
Ham Hocks- 11.3 lbs
Pork Sausage- 22.4 lbs
(Boneless & not linked)

4 Friends Meat Market, Clarkston, WA
June 1, 2020

Market Lamb Example:

Quick Facts: Harvesting a Lamb for Home Consumption

- Most market ready lambs are raised to be market ready for optimal meat quality at between 6-12 months of age, or between 125-145 pounds. However, smaller breeds, light muscled breeds (maternal breeds vs terminal sire breeds) or the way they were raised such as grass-fed lambs may have lighter live weights resulting in lower carcass weights, dressing percentages and/or cut-out percentages. Ewe lambs tend to have more internal fat than a wether lamb (castrated male). Lamb meat from an animal over one year of age is referred to as mutton and can have a stronger more pungent flavor than lamb. If you decide to harvest an intact male (ram or buck) the off flavor increases significantly as a result of secondary sex characteristics and the presence of testosterone resulting in ram taint. Some cultures and



people do not find this offensive but most prefer a more mild flavor profile. Young lamb harvested before 8-10 months of age typically has a very mild lamb flavor. By looking at a lamb's teeth, an experienced shepherd will be able to verify its age prior to harvest.

- When harvested, market lambs (125-145 pounds) will typically dress between 48-54%; meaning that the hanging carcass weight will be about 60-80 pounds. Heavier muscled and fatter animals will typically have a higher dressing percentage. Animals with more fill in their stomach, a heavier pelt (full fleeced vs. shorn), with horns, lighter-muscled, or dirtier/muddy animals will typically have a lower dressing percentage. Dressing percentage reflects only that portion of the carcass that hangs on the rail after it is butchered. The dressing percentage of animals that are on full feed when weighed can be as low as 46-48% of the live weight. The hanging weight of a carcass is the weight that is typically used to calculate the cut and wrap fee. However, some butchers charge one flat rate for the harvesting, cutting and wrapping of a lamb.



- A hanging lamb carcass will typically yield about 70-75% of mostly bone-in cuts, resulting in approximately 40-60 pounds of meat to take home. However, if you have more cuts made into boneless



products like a boneless leg of lamb or shoulder, or request primal meat cuts be made into stew meat or ground lamb, the hanging carcass will yield about 60-65% boneless meat cuts (35-50 pounds of take-home meat). Basically, the more fat trimmed and the more bone taken out of the meat cuts, the less pounds of meat you will take-home. However, remember it is essentially the same amount of total edible meat. The difference is how the meat was cut and packaged (with the bones removed at the butcher shop), versus when you prepare and cook the

product at home. The pounds of take-home meat will be less than the hanging weight used to calculate the cut and wrap cost. A skilled meat cutter will be able to assist you in deciding what meat cuts are available from specific portions of the carcass (Leg, Shoulder, etc.).



- Most freezers will hold approximately 35-40 pounds of meat per cubic foot. "The Cube" ice chest will typically hold one lamb if the legs have been halved or are deboned, and shoulders have been deboned.

Example of the different meats cuts and weights from a market-ready lamb. This is an example of a trim, high-yielding animal.



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