

## Purchasing or Raising Beef for Your Freezer

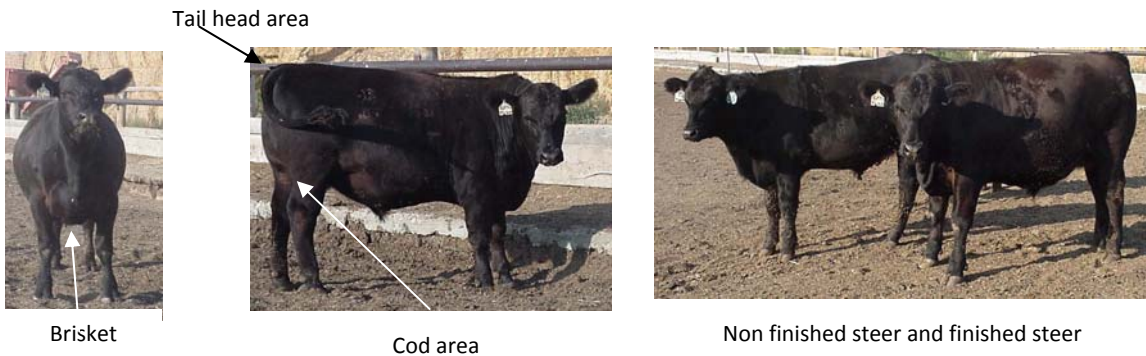
### What you need to know!

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Many people are seeking local producers or 4-H/FFA youth projects to purchase meat for their household freezer. This paper addresses some questions of those purchasing beef for the first time.

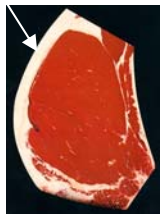
### When is a beef animal ready for the butcher?

Many things affect when the animal is ready (finished); age, sex, feeding program, and frame size are just a few. Ideally, you should see fat deposits in the brisket, cod, and tail head areas on the live animal.



### What is marbling?

Marbling is specks of fat found within muscle tissue and is measured in the ribeye muscle of a hanging carcass between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> rib. The amount of marbling varies greatly between carcasses. The amount of marbling, along with age of the animal, texture, firmness, and color of the muscle determine quality grade. Quality grades help indicate the overall eating quality of beef which includes tenderness, juiciness, and flavor of cooked meat. The top four quality grades are Prime, Choice, Select, and Standard. **Standard:** the ribeye muscle has no measurable amount of marbling, tenderness is typically very low, and



Select  
Ribeye

there is usually very little outside fat. **Select:** the ribeye muscle contains some marbling, tenderness and juiciness can be extremely variable, and usually not much outside fat. **Choice:** the ribeye muscle contains an average amount of marbling, is usually tender and juicy, and outside fat is variable. **Prime:** the ribeye muscle has a large amount of marbling, is usually very tender, juicy, flavorful, and outside fat is usually very high. In general, the higher the degree of marbling, the more tender, juicy, and flavorful the meat will be. Choice grade cuts are a good compromise in terms of cost and taste, but if you plan on marinating your meat, you can save money by purchasing one of the less expensive quality grades. The marinade will help soften a less tender cut. Beef graded Select is less tender and juicy, but it is also less expensive. The Select grade is a good decision for people watching their fat intake and calories, as well as their expenses.



Prime Ribeye  
Steak

## What is carcass aging?

Aging of beef carcasses helps bring out the “beef flavor” of the meat. Carcasses are allowed to hang in the butcher’s cooler for 7, 14, or 21 days. A suggested hang time is 14 days. However, if your carcass has less than .25 inches of backfat, a shorter hang time should be selected. Carcasses will shrink, during aging, due to water evaporation, and fat cover helps reduce this loss.

## How much beef will I get?

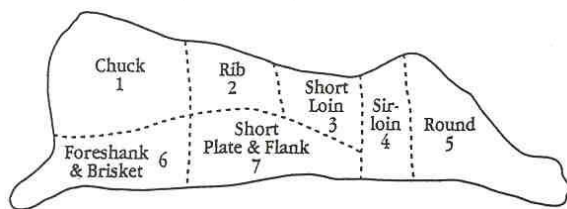
To estimate how much beef will be in your freezer, take the animal’s live weight (1350lbs) times 63% (861lbs) then times 70% (603lbs). Sixty-three percent (dressing percentage) is the amount you receive in muscle and bone when the hide, head, hooves, and internal organs are removed. This number can be higher or lower depending on how much water and feed fill your animal has at the time of live weight. For example, if you purchased a finished (fattened) beef weighing 1350 pounds you could expect to bring home about 603 pounds of packaged meat for your freezer. Processing procedures and the amount of external fat trim affect the amount of cutting loss. Seventy percent is the average amount received when you remove excess fat, bone, cartilage, and shrink from the carcass. This number can range from 65% to 80%. The final amount also depends on the type of cuts you specify.

Live weight (lbs) x 63% = carcass weight

Carcass weight x 70% = freezer amount

## Can I choose the cuts I get?

The meat cutter will custom cut your beef to meet your needs. Therefore, you need to have an idea of what your family likes to eat and how you plan to prepare it. There are seven primal cuts to a beef carcass: chuck (shoulder), rib, short loin, sirloin, round, foreshank and brisket, and short plate and flank.



All steaks, roasts, and other retail cuts come from them. When you take your animal to the custom butcher you will choose what you want done with each primal cut. You will also need to make general choices as to how you want your meat packaged.

- The size (thickness) of your steaks (.25 to 1.5 inch; .75 to 1 inch is most common)
- Number of steaks in a package (1-5)
- Stew meat and/or hamburger
- Pounds of hamburger in a package (1, 1.5, and 2 lbs)
- Pounds of roast in a package (3-5 lbs); boneless or bone-in
- Tenderized/cubed steaks, this is for less tender cuts of the meat such as round steaks
- Variety meats must be requested at time of harvest and include soup bones, tongue, tail, heart, and liver

## What are the potential costs?

How you purchase your animal from producers can vary. Typically the price is quoted per pound of live weight, or per pound of carcass weight. You may also have the option to purchase a side of beef (half). Furthermore, you pay your local butcher a kill fee (ranging from \$10 to \$30) and a per pound of carcass weight fee for cutting and wrapping (usually around .40/lb). You should also keep in mind the cost of purchasing this much meat at one time, what the availability is of a freezer or locker to rent, and if you will utilize all the cuts you will receive.

In summary purchasing market ready animals directly from a producer can be a good option for household freezer beef. You have many custom choices as to the cuts you receive which also affect the final amount in your freezer.