Guide to Buying Meat in Bulk Directly From Farms and Ranches

**Beef**

**Why Buy in Bulk?**

If you have storage space and the funds to purchase upfront, buying meat in bulk (often in the form of livestock “shares”) can be a rewarding, cost-effective way to buy from a farmer or rancher you trust. It allows you to try cuts you might not otherwise get, and saves you a bunch of trips to the butcher. But, it does require a little planning.

**How Much Should I Buy?**

First, you’ll need to think about how much meat your household consumes in order to find the right size share. To do so, use our simple guide.

**Which Beef Share is Right For Me?**

So you’ve settled on buying a beef share from a local farmer or rancher. Now you need to decide which share to buy. Bulk beef is typically sold as a whole, half, or quarter share, and some farmers and ranchers even offer an eighth share.

Ask your farmer or rancher what share sizes are available—you can always try a smaller share at first and see if it works with the way you and your family cook. Remember that buying in bulk means you’ll get a variety of cuts from each animal. You may not be used to cooking with some of these cuts. We’ll get into that more in the next section.

**How Much Meat Do You Eat?**

**Number of meat eaters**

\[
\text{weekly consumption} = \text{Number of meat eaters} \times \frac{\text{average portion size}}{\text{meals per week}} \times \frac{\text{meals per week}}{\text{weeks in a year}}
\]

**Whole Beef**

- **live weight**: 900–1300 lbs
- **Hanging (carcass) weight**: 550–800 lbs
- **Edible meat yield**: 300–500 lbs

**1/2 Beef**

- **live weight**: 450–650 lbs
- **Hanging (carcass) weight**: 275–400 lbs
- **Edible meat yield**: 150–250 lbs

**1/4 Beef**

- **live weight**: 225–325 lbs
- **Hanging (carcass) weight**: 140–200 lbs
- **Edible meat yield**: 75–125 lbs

*These numbers will vary depending on production practices and breeds.*

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What Will I Get?
The exact cuts you'll receive in a farm-direct bulk buy will depend on your farmer or rancher, your butcher, and what you request. Check out the graphics on this page for a general idea.

APPROXIMATE MEAT YIELD FROM 1/4 BEEF

GROUND 30–50 lbs

CHUCK 15 lbs
Chuck Steaks
Chuck Roasts
Arm Roasts
Stew

BRISKET 7 lbs

PLATE 4 lbs
Short Ribs

FLANK 3 lbs
Flank Steak
Sirloin Flap

ROUND 15 lbs
Sirloin Tip Roast
Eye of Round Roast
Top Round Steaks
Beef Shank (Osso Buco)

SIRLOIN 5 lbs
Sirloin Steaks
Sirloin Roast

ARMS
Ribeye Steaks
T-bone Steaks
Porterhouse Steaks

*These numbers will vary depending on production practices and breeds.

Where Do I Store All This Meat?
For some shares, you’ll be able to store the meat in a regular-sized freezer in your home fridge. For larger shares, you might want to purchase another freezer. These freezers can often be purchased used, for a fair price, if you’re on the lookout.

HOW MUCH SPACE IS NEEDED?

=75–125 lbs of meat

=1/4 of an 18 cu.ft chest freezer
4.5 cu.ft.

=1/2 of a 12 cu.ft upright freezer
5.5 cu.ft.

Less than 1/2 of a 12 cu.ft chest freezer
4.5 cu.ft.
How will this work, and what will it cost me?

When buying meat in bulk, you're buying a "share" of a live animal. You will pay two parties: the farmer or rancher and the butcher.

The farmer or rancher will charge you based on the weight of the animal after slaughter (aka “hanging” or “carcass” weight), which includes bones and fat that will be trimmed away later.

The butcher will charge you a "slaughter fee" and a “cut-and-wrap” fee. You’ll fill out a “cut sheet,” which tells the butcher which cuts you prefer, like steaks, roasts, bone-in or boneless, ground, etc. The more specific your requests, the higher the fee.

How Do I Cook All of This?

Great question! Buying meat in bulk normally means getting some cuts you’re unfamiliar with, and that’s part of the fun.

Here’s the gist. Cuts generally fall into two categories: tender and quick-cooking and tougher and slow-cooking. Which category a cut falls into depends on where the muscle is on the animal and how much the animal used it. Remember, all cuts will taste delicious if you know how to cook them. Knowing just a bit about each cut will help you to improvise in the kitchen and get creative. The cheat sheet on this page might be all you need. For more in-depth tips, check out www.goodmeatbreakdown.org.

WSDA’s Regional Markets Meat & Poultry Assistance Program works to strengthen regional meat supply chains by providing support to small farms, ranches and meat processors in Washington. agr.wa.gov/farmfoodbiz

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