

CUTTING SUGGESTIONS FOR BEEF

The following are suggested options for cutting a side of beef, which constitutes one-half of a carcass and includes one hindquarter and one front quarter. The side of beef is divided into eight primal sections: four from the front quarter (chuck, rib, plate, and foreshank) and four from the hindquarter (flank, round, sirloin, and short loin).

Remember that the size of each carcass varies depending on the breed and conformation of the steer. Also, the size of the roasts and the thickness of the steaks will be your decision. Thus, it's impossible to provide an exact inventory of the size and number of each cut you'll receive. Please be aware that the figures below are only estimates. There is tremendous variation in yields owing to differences in breeds, as well as diet. Since they tend to be leaner, grassfed animals may have lower percentages.

Wholesale beef is usually purchased in one of four ways:

1. *Whole beef carcass.* This may require up to 15 cubic feet of freezer space. Although a live beef animal may weigh upward of 1,000 pounds, the estimated meat yields will be only about 50 percent of that weight (about 70 percent of hanging weight). This figure varies considerably depending on how you have the carcass cut. For example, if you choose primarily boneless cuts, the final weight will be significantly less. To determine the cutting instructions, simply double the amount of cuts you see listed here.
2. *Side of beef.* Again, this is one-half of the beef carcass and includes cuts from each of the eight primal sections, which are listed below. Plan on having 7.5 cubic feet of freezer space to accommodate the meat. The estimated yields would be about 25 percent of the live weight (about 35 percent of hanging weight).
3. *Quarter beef.* Some farmers will give you the option of purchasing a front quarter or hindquarter of the carcass. If you find that you use only cuts from certain primal sections, then this is a good option. However, be forewarned that many farmers do not like to sell beef in this fashion. The hindquarter is generally more popular than the front, and if too many people order only hindquarters, the farmer is left trying to market the less-popular front-quarter cuts. Plan on having 3 to 4 cubic feet of freezer space to accommodate the meat. A front quarter of beef will weigh about 12.5 percent of the live weight (17.5 percent of the hanging weight). A hindquarter will weigh roughly 12.5 percent of the live weight (17.5 percent of the hanging weight).
4. *Split half.* Contrary to the name, this is actually a quarter of a carcass. This is often a popular way to buy meat because it gives the buyer most of the variety that comes with a side of beef and enables the farmer to sell the whole carcass with ease. Split halves include a selection of cuts from all the different primal sections. Plan on getting about half of the different cuts you see listed below. However, because the farmer must divide the primal sections between you and other customers, you may have to be flexible about the cutting options. If you still want a split half but want more control over how the primal sections are divided, try finding another family to go in with you on a side of beef, and decide among yourselves how the different cuts should be made. Allow 3 to 4 cubic feet of freezer space. The meat will weigh roughly 12.5 percent of the animal's live weight (about 17.5 percent of hanging weight).

SOME GENERAL EXPLANATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Live Weight: The amount an animal weighs while still alive, just before slaughter.

Hanging Weight: The weight of the carcass after slaughter and dressing, before it has been cut. This weight does not include things such as the blood, hide, head, or innards.

Required Freezer Space: Plan on allowing 1 cubic foot of freezer space for 35 pounds of meat.