

Buying Beef for Home Freezers

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Many consumers are contemplating the purchase of bulk beef for home freezers. Beef can be purchased as a live animal or as a dressed beef carcass. Buying beef in quantity may be the way to save money but it depends upon your situation. When buying beef in bulk many questions will arise. This fact sheet contains questions and answers which may be helpful when one considers purchasing beef.

Basically there are 3 ways to buy meat:

- As a whole carcass, or a side (including both hind or forequarters).
- As a wholesale cut, such as a loin, round, chuck, or rib.
- 3) As a retail cut.

The following questions may help decide which way is the best for your situation.

Is It Wise to Buy a Side or a Quarter of Beef to be Cut, Packaged, and Quick Frozen for Freezer Storage?

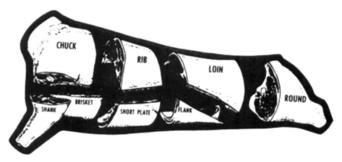
Consider these factors before deciding: The meat cuts served most often; amount of freezer storage space; how much the family consumes in a certain period of time; the community facilities for cutting, packaging, and quick freezing.

What is the Advantage of Buying in Quantity Rather than on a Day to Day or Week to Week Basis?

Consider the amount of money available to invest in one kind of meat, as well as, the total cost and the amount saved by buying a large quantity of beef.

How Many Pounds of Meat will my Freezer Hold?

A rule of thumb is one cubic foot of freezer space for each 35-40 pounds of cut and wrapped meat. Allow slightly more space when the meat is packaged in odd shapes.



Primal (Wholesale) cuts of Beef

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How many Pounds of Meat are there in a Carcass, a Side, a Quarter, or a Wholesale Cut?

An average beef carcass weighs about 600 pounds. A side usually weighs slightly over 300 lbs. This refers to the hanging weight or the gross weight by which the carcass is sold. Remember: the price that one pays is based on the hanging weight. The average weight losses from cutting and trimming make up about 25% of a yield grade 3 carcass leaving about 450 pounds of usable meat cuts from a carcass or 225 pounds from a side. When buying beef one must be familiar with how much fat is on the carcass because this will influence the amount of product in the packages. A rule of thumb for carcass beef is 25% waste, 25% ground beef and stew meat. 25% in steaks, and 25% in roasts.

Cutting and trimming procedures influence the percent retail yield. When fat and bone are removed the percent retail yield decreases. Table 1 shows the approximate retail yields from carcasses of different yield grades.

Table 1. Percent Retail Yields from Carcasses of Different Yield Grades.

Yield	Side	Forequarter	Hindquarter
Grade	% Retail Value	% Retail Yield	% Retail Yield
1	82.0	84.0	79.9
2	77.4	79.0	74.9
3	72.8	75.6	69.9
4	68.2	71.4	64.9
5	63.6	67.2	59.9

What are the Advantages to Buying a Whole Carcass or a Side?

When one buys a whole carcass or a side a variety of high and low priced cuts are obtained. You will get some cuts such as the brisket, short ribs, and shank not normally purchased. Usually locker plants and meat markets will convert such cuts into ground meat or stew meat. Meat processors will often age the meat for 10 days or the period desired and will cut it according to specifications. In addition, one may specify how the side or wholesale carcass is cut. For a carcass or a side to be a "good buy" the purchaser must utilize every cut that is made from the carcass. If the family will not eat certain cuts, then it may be wise to have the unacceptable cuts processed into ground beef. If one uses a great deal of ground beef then it may be wise to purchase only the forequarter. Buying a carcass or a side may be less

expensive per pound, but remember that 24-45% is lost from cutting, trimming, and boning depending on the yield grade of the carcass. In comparing alternatives include the cost of cutting, wrapping, quick freezing, any interest for financing the purchase, and the finance costs on the freezer, as well as the freezer operation costs.

Are there Advantages to Buying a Quarter?

Buying a quarter involves many of the same considerations, but one may be a little more selective in doing so. Hind quarters, which include the wholesale round, loin, and the flank will give more steaks and roasts, but will cost more per pound than a side or carcass. A forequarter, which includes the chuck, rib, brisket, plate, and full flank has more of the less tender cuts. These cuts yield more of the pieces which require pot roasting but will provide a higher percentage of usable lean meat and costs less than the side or carcass.

Advantage to Buying Wholesale Cuts?

Wholesale pieces involve less total cost and the packages require less freezer space. Buying wholesale pieces allows one to select the retail cuts preferred. If one likes pot roast, the chuck would be a good buy, if one likes steaks, the wholesale loin will provide porterhouse, T-bone, and the sirloin steaks.

The wholesale rib could be processed into all rib steaks, or rib steak and rib roasts. Retail cuts from the rib are usually very tender and suitable for broiling.

The wholesale round produces some very desirable roasts from the rump and somewhat less tender round steaks.

Is it Cheaper to Buy Retail Cuts at the Meat Markets and Freeze them or is it Cheaper to Buy Beef Sides or Quarters?

Advantages to buying retail cuts for freezing are:

- It is easier to get the assortment of cuts preferred by the family without buying items you seldom or never use,
- 2) Investment is smaller since the storage area is for a shorter time,
- 3) Many times the retail beef cuts sell as specials. Since retail items are not packaged for freezing, they should be packaged properly for long term freezing. The advantages of buying a full side or quarter of beef are: roasts and steaks can be cut to the desired weight and thickness,
- 4) The food budget can be planned for a longer period since the actual meat costs are known, and
- 5) Many trips to the market can be eliminated.

Should I Freeze the Meat Myself or Have it Done by a Commercial Establishment?

For large meat purchases it is best to have freezing done by a commercial establishment who has the proper equipment for quick freezing. Slow freezing causes more of the meat fibers to rupture due to the formation of large ice crystals. This means more juices are lost when the meat is thawed. So in purchasing large quantities always purchase them frozen. Be sure that the operator or processor has quick frozen the meat before it is taken to the home freezer. Meat should be initially frozen at -10°F or lower and as quickly as possible.

How Long Can Meat be Frozen and Still Maintain its Quality?

Beef can be stored from 9-12 months. Ground beef can be stored from 3-4 months. Most meat items can be safely stored for longer periods, but they lose some quality. Long storage periods contribute to freezer burn, dehydration, and broken packages, which results in sacrificing quality and quantity. Shorter storage periods can reduce storage investment costs. Decide whether or not your family can eat a side of beef within a year before you buy.

Buying Beef

- Buy from a dependable supplier, choose a firm which sells the grade, the weight, and the amount of meat you prefer.
- Buy inspected beef. Check the place out to see that the establishment is a clean inspected operation.
- Purchase only the amount of meat needed. Some consumers prefer a carcass or a side of beef but others feel that a quarter or one wholesale cut is enough.
- 4) Choose beef suited to your purpose. While some families prefer roasts, steaks, and pot roasts others are more interested in ground beef and stew beef. If all of the cuts in a carcass are not used, then the next beef purchase should include only those which are.
- 5) The amount of refrigeration and freezer space available are important when considering the amount of beef to purchase. The approximate cost per pound of wrapped meat is determined by the price per pound of weight divided by the percent yield of edible meat.

\$ cost per lb. of = packaged meat	\$ Price/Lb. Carcass weight (includes cutting and wrapping cost)	
	% edible me	at
An example is: \$1.78 cost per lb. of packaged meat =	\$1.25 price/lb carcass (including cutting and wrapping)	weight
	70% edible meat	

In summary, the steer is not all steaks nor is the carcass all steaks. Consumers contemplating the purchase of carcass beef should calculate the approximate cost per pound of edible meat and then consider if it is cheaper to buy bulk meat in the form of a live animal, a carcass, or buy meat on a special in the supermarket.

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