

# More Meat for Your Money

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## Educational Objectives

1. Learn how to save money by purchasing less expensive cuts of beef and pork.
2. Understand the best cooking methods for less expensive cuts.
3. Learn ways to stretch the amount of meat you use.

At your grocer's meat department it is often difficult to know which cut of meat to buy for a specific recipe or cooking method. You want to consider which piece of meat is the leanest and healthiest and will provide the best flavor.

Live animals or carcasses that are transported across state lines must be inspected. The inspectors put a purple stamp on the wholesale cuts to assure the consumer that the meat is safe to eat. Meat sold in-state is inspected by state supported programs.



## Grading

The grading of beef and pork is voluntary and dependent on several factors including:

- Marbling – the flecks of fat throughout the meat that make it juicier, tenderer and flavorful.
- Maturity – the younger the animal, the tenderer the meat.
- Texture – the fine muscle texture gives it a higher grade.
- Appearance – the animal's general characteristics.

The most popular grading system includes prime, choice and select. Choice and select are the most common grades sold in grocery stores, while prime cuts are usually sold to high-end restaurants. Those cuts that are marked prime may be tenderer but because of the fat they may not be as healthy. Those marked select will be the leaner meats.

## Beef

Beef comes from a cow that is older than 12 months of age, while veal comes from a cow that is less than three months of age. Before the meat is shipped to the grocer, the carcass of the cow is cut in half

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through the backbone creating two sides of beef. Each side is then cut into quarters and smaller portions or wholesale pieces. These pieces end up at the meat cutter who will cut it into retail pieces to be sold in the local grocery store.

Knowing how to identify the factors associated with the cuts of meat can help you make better purchases. When you know which part of the animal the meat comes from, you can choose leaner, healthier and tenderer cuts. The location of the meat on the animal will determine its tenderness. The part of the animal that receives the least amount of exercise will be the tenderest but not necessarily the healthiest.

The USDA defines a lean cut of beef as a 3.5 ounce serving size having less than 10 grams total fat and 4.5 grams of saturated fat. An extra lean cut of meat will have 5 grams of total fat and only 2 grams of saturated fat. Look at the nutrition label to determine if it meets these guidelines. There are 20 cuts of meat matching that standard. Lean cuts of meat will have “loin” or “round” in the name. A few of those that are considered by the USDA to be lean are:

- Eye of round roast or steak
- Sirloin tip roast or steak
- Top or bottom round roast or steak
- Top sirloin steak
- Beef T-bone steak
- Ground beef with less than 10 percent fat (ground sirloin)



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## Cooking Methods for Beef

Cooking the meat destroys harmful bacteria. It also improves the taste and makes some meat tenderer, because it softens the collagen in the muscle during cooking. One can also tenderize meat mechanically by pounding or chemically by marinating or using a commercial meat tenderizer.

It is important to control the temperature when cooking meat. Cooking it at the proper temperature will allow the meat to be juicy, flavorful and easier to carve. Cooking meat at too high a temperature will make it tough and dry. It will also cause the meat to shrink, decreasing size and weight. Cooking meat at too low a temperature could allow bacteria to grow before the meat is finished cooking. It is important not to cook the meat below 325 degrees Fahrenheit and to use a meat thermometer to check the internal temperature. Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the muscle.

Steaks and roasts should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 145 degrees Fahrenheit or higher for medium, well or well-done. Ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit. In both cases, the cooked meat should rest for three minutes before carving or eating for safety and quality reasons.

When thawing meat always do so in the refrigerator. It is safe to use frozen meat in the oven, on the stove or grill. However, it is not recommended to cook frozen meat in a slow cooker, as there is the risk of harmful bacteria contaminating the meat before it reaches a safe temperature.

When choosing a cooking method the healthiest ways are grilling, baking or broiling. Below is a list of various cooking methods and the healthy cuts best-suited for each method. Remember to cut any visible fat from the meat before you cook it.





## Dry Heat

- Grilling uses a gas or charcoal grill at medium heat. Season beef with herbs and spices before cooking. Best cuts of meat for grilling are strip steak or flank steak.
- Broiling can be a great way to cook meat, especially when you don't have access to a grill. The broiler provides consistent temperature control and the convenience of indoor cooking. Cook the meat on the top rack about 4 inches from the top heating element. Best-suited cuts of meat are T-bone and tenderloin steak that are medium width or lean ground beef.
- Oven roasting is one of the simplest way to cook meat. When using dry heat, no added liquid is needed. Set the oven temperature to 325 degrees Fahrenheit, place an oven proof thermometer in the thickest part of the roast and check back in a few hours depending on the size of the roast. Let meat set for a 15 to 20 minutes for easier carving and a juicier piece of meat. Use an aluminum foil tent over the meat during standing time.

## Moist Heat

- Braising is when you slowly brown the beef on all sides using a small amount of oil in a heavy pan on the stove. Then, pour off the drippings and season the beef with herbs or seasonings. Add a small amount of liquid (water, juice, beer or wine.) Cook by

simmering gently in a covered pan over low heat on top of the range or in a preheated oven at 325 degrees Fahrenheit until beef is fork-tender and reaches proper temperature. Best cuts of meat for this method are bottom round roast, bottom round steak, fresh brisket and shoulder steak boneless.

- Slow cooking is an easy way to have a meat ready after a long day away from home. Choose the proper temperature based on how long you will need the meat to cook. Best cuts of meat for this method are brisket and bottom round roast.

## Pork

Pork comes from a pig that is usually between 7 to 12 months old. Since the animal is young, the meat is usually tender.

The area between the shoulder and back legs of the pig are the leanest, tenderest part of the animal. Rib and loin chops are cut from this area, as well as pork loin and tenderloin roasts. Be careful not to overcook these cuts of meat as they will become dry. Grilling, pan searing, braising or roasting are cooking methods best suited for these cuts.

The shoulder and belly area of the pig have a lot of fat. Roasts come from the shoulder area and are best cooked by braising, stewing or barbecuing. The belly of the pig, the fattest part, provides spareribs and bacon. The leg



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by Steven Lilley



of the pig is often referred to as the ham. Hams can be purchased either fresh or cured and smoked. Pork products should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit.

## Ways to Stretch Meat

- Mix cooked ground meat (beef, chicken or turkey) with beans, lentils, rice, pasta, vegetables and seasonings for tacos or other Mexican-type fillings.

- Make stir-fry or kabobs, and use less meat and lots of vegetables.

- Add rice to meatballs and bread crumbs or oatmeal to meatloaf. Hidden vegetables will also help stretch the meat and provide extra nutrition, so add grated carrots or zucchini.



- Leftover roast beef, steak or chicken can become sandwiches, quesadillas or fajitas. Add thinly-sliced onions and bell peppers or shredded cheese.
- Leftover roast beef can become beef stir-fry with fresh ginger, sliced bell peppers and green onions. Use mandarin oranges to add an Asian flavor.
- Turn leftover roast beef into creamy beef stroganoff with mushrooms served over noodles.
- Cooked pork chops can be cubed and added to potato soup, or made into pork fried rice by adding cooked rice, ginger, scallions, vegetables and eggs.

## Ways to Save Money on Meat Purchases

- It is often cheaper to buy a large cut of meat and divide it into several meals or servings than to buy the component cuts separately. Marinate cuts of meat that need to be tenderized. Make your own sauces rather than buying pre-marinated meats.
- Compare prices of packaged deli meats versus the price of the same items in the meat case.
- Remember to match the cooking method with the type of meat. Less tender meats are usually less expensive but need moist heat at low temperatures.
- Shop early in the day to take advantage of marked down meats. Either cook the meat that day or freeze it for later use.

### Activities

- Discuss your favorite marinade to use on beef or pork.
- Discuss what you do to save money on meat purchases.
- Discuss ideas you have on how to stretch your meat dollars.
- Ask your county WVU Extension Service office for a chart of beef and pork cuts.

## Resources

Largen, V., and Bence, D. (1996). *Guide to Good Food*. Tinley Park, IL: The Goodhart-Willcox Company.

Confident Cooking with Beef. Retrieved May 1, 2016, from <http://beefretail.org/CMDocs/BeefRetail/customerhandouts/ConfidentCookingwithBeef.pdf>.

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2016

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FH16-294

