



Your Beef Breakdown, Explained

In case you have ever purchase a quarter, a side or a whole beef, chances are you have wondered why you received less meat than expected. The average weight of a live steer or heifer ready for harvest is 1,200 pounds! So how much of this meat should you expect to receive in edible products?

Steer to Carcass

In order to change, a 1,200 pound beef animal into meat product, butchers first have to convert it into a carcass by removing the hide, head and internal organs. On average, only 60% of the animals original weight remains, resulting in an average carcass weight of 720 pounds.

The beef carcass, which now only contains fat, bone, connective tissue and meat, is then chilled and hung for an aging process, approximately 14-21 days. Chilling of the carcass converts muscle to meat. Once the meat is chilled properly, the carcass is then "aged" for the rest of the 14-21 days period. During this aging process the meat develops flavor, and most importantly, becomes more tender. Unfortunately, a small amount of weight is lost during the aging process due to water evaporation.

Carcass to Cuts

After the carcass is properly aged, it is ready to be broken down into retail cuts. On average, with grass-fed beef, 40% of each carcass is inedible bone, fat & connective tissue, which means the whole carcass will yield about 432 pounds of edible product. This number increases substantially when people utilize the lesser known parts of the animal, such as bones for making rich bone broth, and the heart, liver and tongue.

Each beef carcass contains more than 200 muscles. Some of the muscles will become high quality steaks such as Tenderloin or Rib-eye or Sirloin. Other muscles may be trimmed into chuck or round roasts, while others of lesser value are converted into stew cubes or ground beef.

The Bottom Line

Maybe you're a newbie, and you don't know where to start! Here's what you can do: ask your butcher for all the prime steaks cuts available, next all the roasts that are left, and then turn the rest into ground beef. You will end up with approximately 20% steaks, 30% roasts, and 50% ground beef.

Remember, not all carcasses are equal and carcass data will vary depending on breed, size, fatness level and cutting method.

