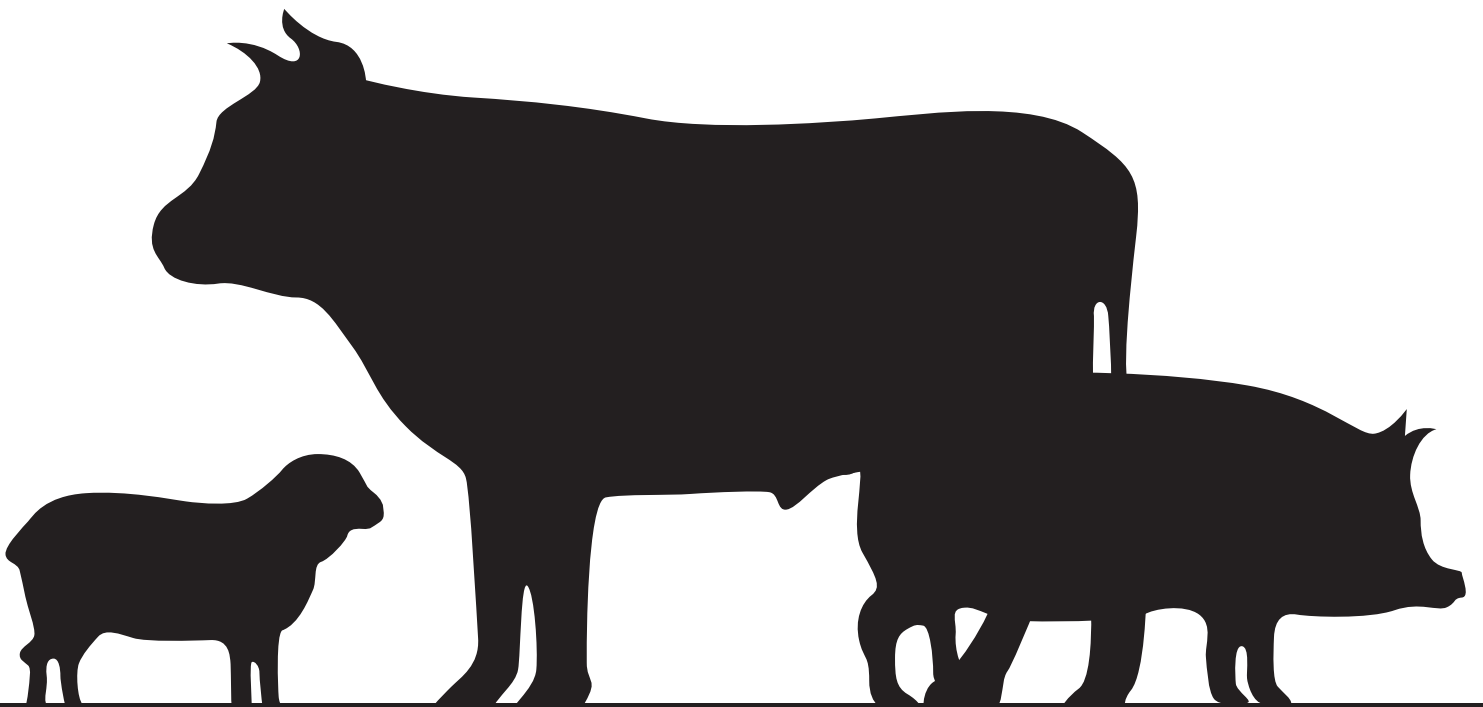


BUYING LOCALLY  
RAISED MEAT FOR  
**CUSTOM  
PROCESSING**





PURCHASING LOCALLY RAISED MEAT allows you to support local livestock producers and to know where and how your meat animal was raised. Most people who buy meat from a local producer purchase a live animal (or a portion of one) and have it butchered by a “custom-exempt” processing plant. With local processing to your specifications, you’ll get cuts, packaging, and processing options to fit your family’s needs and cooking style.

Here’s how the process works:

## **What is a custom-exempt plant?**

A majority of small meat-processing plants and most meat-processing plants in rural areas are “custom-exempt.” This means they can slaughter and process livestock only for the exclusive use of the animal’s owner, the owner’s family, and/or the owner’s non-paying guests. Packages are required to be labeled “NOT FOR SALE.”

When a producer sells you a live animal, you become the owner and can have the animal processed at the custom-exempt plant. Normally, the producer will contact the processing facility on your behalf and arrange for delivery of your animal to the plant as a courtesy.

## **How do custom-exempt plants differ from USDA plants?**

### **Is the meat safe?**

Idaho’s “custom-exempt” plants are licensed by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture Food Safety Program. Plants that process meat that can be sold by the individual cut, on the other hand, are regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture.

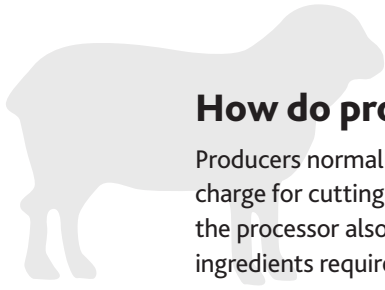
Custom processors handle meat in a safe, clean, and ethical way and process it in a clean and inspected facility. They are regularly inspected for overall sanitation to ensure that the meats they process are safe to eat. They do not, however, have a federal inspector on duty at all times. Meat from custom-exempt facilities cannot be sold retail or across state lines.

## **I want to purchase an animal from a local producer.**

### **Where do I start and what questions should I ask?**

To find a local producer, contact your local Extension office or a local custom-processing plant for a list of producers and the livestock they produce. Then learn about about the producer’s operation:

- **Availability.** Producers have a production schedule that determines when they raise animals and have them ready for sale. Like garden vegetables, meat products are not necessarily sold year-round.
- **Minimum purchase.** If you are interested in purchasing only a portion of an animal (a half or quarter), keep in mind the producer has to sell the whole animal before harvesting. You might recruit friends or family members to share the animal with you or ask the producer if you can share with other buyers on their list.
- **Animal feed.** Animals are fed differently (for example, grain, hay, pasture) depending on where they are raised. Ask the producer what they feed their animals if you have a preference for a certain feeding type, such as “grass-fed” or “grain-fed.”
- **Animal age.** Ask the producer the age of the animal you will be purchasing. Age can influence meat quality and taste as well as availability of certain cuts. Most beef animals are harvested between 16 and 24 months of age, lambs between 4 and 8 months, and hogs between 5 and 10 months.



## How do producers and processors charge for their products?

Producers normally price animals they sell to you on a live-weight basis. Processors, on the other hand, charge for cutting and wrapping on the basis of the animal's hanging weight (carcass weight). Normally the processor also charges a harvest fee and fees for curing meat due to the increased time and ingredients required by the curing process.

## How much meat can I expect from my animal?

The pounds of meat you take home depends on the live weight of the animal and the amounts lost during processing such as skin, fat, bone, and intestines.

### Average live weights, dressing percentages, carcass weights, carcass yields, and amounts of packaged meat to expect from different animals

	Live weight (pounds)	Dressing percentage (%)	Carcass weight (pounds)	Carcass yield (%)	Packaged meat to expect (pounds)
Beef animal	1250	62%	775	67%	519
Hog	280	75%	210	70%	147
Lamb	135	52%	70	68%	48

Note: The values assume carcasses were cut into both bone-in and boneless steaks and roasts, that cuts were closely trimmed, and that grinding produced regular ground beef, pork or lamb.

- **Live weight** is the animal's weight on the day it is harvested.
- **Dressing percentage** is the percentage of live weight remaining after removal of the hide, hooves, head, and intestines.
- **Hanging weight (carcass weight)** is the weight of the carcass after the skin, head, non-useable organs, and hooves are removed. Carcass weight can be calculated:  
Live weight × Dressing percentage = Carcass weight.
- **Carcass yield** is the percentage of the carcass that actually ends up as meat after fat and bone have been trimmed off.
- **Amount of packaged meat** to expect can be calculated like this:  
Carcass weight × Carcass yield = Pounds of meat.  
If you purchase a half or quarter of an animal, you would reduce the amount of meat by that amount.

## How much freezer space will I need?

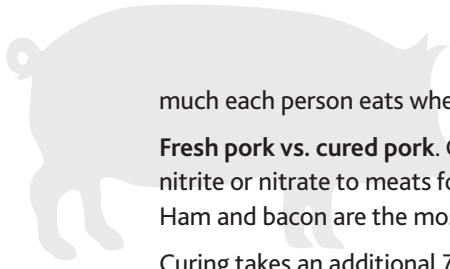
One cubic foot of freezer space will hold approximately 30 pounds of meat. An upright freezer will hold slightly less.

## What do I need to know when I talk to the custom processor?

**Thickness of chops and steaks.** Most chops and steaks in the grocery store are cut ½- to ¾-inch thick. The thicker the cuts, the fewer individual chops or steaks you will have.

**Number of chops or steaks to a package.** On average, plan on one chop or steak per person. If you have young children, consider one-half per person. For lamb chops, consider two chops per person for teenagers and adults.

**Weight of hams or roasts.** Most recipes and guidelines recommend ½ pound of boneless meat per person (1 pound for bone-in cuts). Consider the number of people you serve at a typical meal and how



much each person eats when determining how many pounds you want each ham or roast to weigh.

**Fresh pork vs. cured pork.** Curing of meat is an ancient practice. It is the application of salt, sugar, and nitrite or nitrate to meats for the purpose of preservation, flavor enhancement, or color development. Ham and bacon are the most common cured meats. You can request a ham roast or ham slices.

Curing takes an additional 7 to 14 days depending on the thickness of the meat and the method used.

**Sausage vs. fresh ground pork.** Sausage is ground pork that has seasoning added to it.

**Cubed steak vs. regular steak.** Cubed steak is boneless, and it has been put through a machine that tenderizes it by mechanically breaking down the meat fibers.

**Ground meat vs. stir-fry meat vs. stew meat.** Processors utilize all the trimmings and pieces of meat from the carcass. They grind small chunks into burger (ground meat) or cut them into smaller pieces for stir-fry or stew.

**Variety meats.** Request soup bones, tongue, oxtail, heart, liver, etc., at the time of harvest.

**Pounds of ground meat per package.** Consider how many people you serve at a typical meal. A rule of thumb is  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound to  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound per person. Many processors charge extra if you ask for packages containing less than 1 pound of ground meat.

## How will my processing choices affect the amount of product I receive?

**Bone-in vs. boneless.** This can dramatically affect the pounds of product you take home. If you request more boneless cuts, you will receive fewer pounds of product. If you prefer bone-in chuck roasts, rib steaks, T-bones, or other bone-in cuts, you will receive more pounds of product. The amount of edible meat will not change, however. If you get soup bones, short ribs, and other boney cuts you'll get more pounds of product than if you get these items boned and put into ground meat.

**External fat.** If the processor leaves more external fat on the meat cuts, the pounds of product you receive will be higher than if the meat cuts are closely trimmed.

**Leanness of the ground meat.** If the ground meat is made very lean (with very little fat added at grinding), the pounds of product you receive will be lower than if it is made with more fat. For example, a typical beef carcass could produce 20 more pounds of ground beef if it is made into "70% lean" ground beef instead of "93% lean" ground beef.

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Published February 2016 • ©2016 by the University of Idaho