

WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN  
November 17, 2020

Kelsey Nordyke, Ag and Natural Resources Agent  
K-State Research and Extension, Cowley County  
P.O. Box 538, 311 East 9th  
Winfield, KS 67156

### THE BUTCHER STOLE MY MEAT!

COVID-19 brought about a lot of changes, shortages and disruption to our daily lives and our food supply was not unaffected. Disruption in food supply chains last spring and summer had many families scrambling to secure quality food protein sources from their local food retailers, resulting in many turning to local producers to source meat. Buying locally can definitely have its advantages. When you buy local, you have the assurance of knowing you are supporting your friends and neighbors, plus, you know exactly where that product came from. However, if you're new to purchasing meat directly from the producer, you may want to go into the process with an idea of just how much meat you're going to get. This will help you to determine how much freezer space you'll need as well as how long the product will last your family.

If you're new to purchasing locally produced meat, also known as "locker beef", "locker pork", etc., you usually have the option to purchase a whole, half (side) or quarter of an animal from the farmer/rancher. Some consumers are surprised after receiving their meat, how much or how little they receive? How can it be that a 1250 pound steer only yielded 475 pounds of beef, or a 250 pound hog generated only 125 pounds of pork? No, the butcher didn't steal your meat. Take into consideration what happens during the conversion of a market animal into cut and packaged meat, and chances are the math will make more sense.

First, consider dressing percentage. Dressing percentage is the weight of the carcass relative to the live weight of the animal. To determine dressing percent, we take the carcass weight, divide it by the live weight and multiply by 100. Dressing percent can be affected by gut fill, fatness, mud on the hide, or shorn versus unshorn. Very fat animals have higher dressing percentages than light very lean animals.

The next step in the harvest process, cutting, also affects the weight of the meat you receive. How you order your meat, or your cutting order helps to determine just how much meat you end up with. Choosing boneless cuts will decrease the amount of product you receive. So, what's a good rule of thumb for the amount of meat you'll get back based on boneless, or bone-in cuts? For pork carcasses, bone-in cuts, you can expect to receive no more than 75-80% of the carcass weight back and for boneless, 65-70%. Beef bone-in cuts result in 65-70% of the carcass weight, or 55-60% for boneless. Most lamb cuts are bone-in and you can expect to receive no more than 70-75% of the carcass weight back as meat.

In addition to bone-in versus boneless cuts, the amount of fat in the meat affects what you receive back from the butcher. How lean would you like your ground cuts? Choosing meat with 10% fat versus 20% fat will decrease the total yield. If an animal was overly fat to begin with, more fat will need to be trimmed away in the cutting process, thus reducing total pounds of meat returned.

Lastly, aging and additional processing plays a role in the amount of meat the consumer ultimately receives back. No, aging does not refer to the age of the animal at the time of slaughter. Aging is the amount of time the meat has been stored and refrigerated after slaughter. This is done to enhance tenderness and flavor. The longer a whole carcass hangs, the more moisture it loses due to evaporative processes. Thus, the carcass loses weight. Beef carcasses are typically aged for 14 days to allow natural processes to improve flavor and tenderness. Additional processing includes curing. Did you purchase a hog for the bacon, ham or smoked sausages? Applying heat processes will decrease the yield from the carcass and the amount decrease varies with the cut and process.

Cowley County is an agricultural community with many options for purchasing locally sourced meat. Consumers are encouraged to go into the process as educated as possible, but also be willing to ask questions of the farmer/rancher as well as the locker. Additional helpful information can be found by contacting the Cowley County Extension Office at 620-221-5450.

-30-

Sources:

D.M. Wulf, (1999). Did the locker plant steal some of my meat? <http://ars.sdstate.edu/MeatSci/May99-1.htm>

C.R. Raines. The butcher kept your meat? <https://animalscience.psu.edu/extension/meat/pdf/The%20Butcher%20Stole%20My%20Meat.pdf>