CUSTOM MEAT GUIDE · STEP 1: BEFORE YOU BUY

Buying a Whole, Half, or Quarter Beef

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THE SHORT ANSWER

You buy a **share of a live animal** from a rancher, before it's slaughtered. Then it's processed for you: Howard slaughters it on the farm, it hangs 14–21 days in our cooler, it's cut and wrapped the way you ask, and you pick it up. A half beef is usually around **240 lb of meat** and fits in a standard chest freezer.

How It Works in Washington

Beef bought this way is **custom-exempt**. You buy the animal, or your share of it, while it's still alive, and the meat is processed for you instead of being sold by the cut. Washington's Department of Agriculture expects the buyer to own the animal before it's slaughtered, and the meat is only for the owners' households. Our guide to custom-exempt meat explains the rules.

Step by Step

1. **Find a rancher and agree on a price.** Ask how they price it (see what a half beef really costs).
2. **Get on our schedule.** You or the rancher calls us at (509) 900-7145. A few weeks' notice is ideal, and more in the fall.
3. **Slaughter day.** Howard comes to the farm, slaughters and skins the animal there, and brings the carcass back to our shop in refrigerated conditions.
4. **Hanging.** Beef typically hangs 14–21 days, which builds tenderness and flavor.
5. **Cutting instructions.** Tell us your steaks, roasts, ground beef, and packaging (see how to fill out a cut sheet). If we don't hear back, it's cut as a standard cut.

6. **Pickup.** We call when it's ready. Pay for and pick up your full order within 5 business days, and bring coolers for the drive home.

Whole, Half, or Quarter?

Using the same 1,200 lb steer as our hanging weight guide:

Whole

480 lb
of meat, about 14–16 cubic feet of freezer

Big families, or splitting later between households.

Half (a "side")

240 lb
of meat, about 7–8 cubic feet of freezer

A family that eats beef often, with your own cut choices.

Quarter

120 lb
of meat, about 3–4 cubic feet of freezer

A smaller household. Standard cut only.

A whole beef may need two freezers. A half usually fits in a 15–20 cubic foot chest freezer; try the freezer space planner to check yours.

Front quarter or hind quarter?

They aren't the same. In Washington's own yield chart, the hind quarter has the T-bones, sirloin, and round, with less ground beef. The front quarter has the rib steaks, chuck roasts, and short ribs, with more ground beef. Ask the rancher how quarters are divided. All quarter beef orders here are standard cut, with no exceptions.

Splitting a Beef With Friends or Family

- Each person or household must own their share before the animal is slaughtered. Washington recommends no more than eight owners per animal.
- The meat is for each owner's household. It can't be resold.
- Agree ahead of time on who calls us with the cutting instructions, and how the rancher's price and the processing will be split.
- Plan for everyone to pick up within 5 business days of our call.

Questions to Ask the Rancher

- Is the price per pound of hanging weight, per pound of live weight, or a flat price? Does it include processing? (Processing is usually paid to us separately.)
- About what hanging weight do you expect?
- How was the animal raised and finished, on grass or on grain?
- How much is the deposit, and when is the rest due?
- When will it be ready, and who schedules the slaughter with us?

When to Buy

Fall is the busiest time of year for processors, and hunting season fills our schedule too. If you want beef in the freezer by winter, line up the rancher and call us as early as you can.

Questions? Call Howard & Mia.

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Read it online, with calculators:
handmcustommeat.com/guide/buying-a-half-beef/

Sources

Selling Beef, Pork, Lamb, Goat and Other Meat (Fact Sheet 27), Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/DO/RM/RM/27_SellingBeefPorkLambGoatAndOtherMeat.pdf

Custom Meat Record-Keeping Tips for Farmers, Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://agr.wa.gov/departments/business-and-marketing-support/small-farm/meat-and-poultry-assistance/resources/custom-meat-record-keeping-tips-for-farmers

Processing Percentage (custom meat yield chart), Washington State Department of Agriculture
https://agr.wa.gov/departments/food-safety/food-safety/custom-meats/processing-percentage

Figures are typical ranges from these sources; every animal is different. Prices are subject to change.