CUSTOM MEAT GUIDE · STEP 3: FOR HUNTERS

How Much Meat From a Deer or Elk?

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THE SHORT ANSWER

Expect boneless meat to be a little **under half of the field-dressed weight**: about 43–48% for deer and 43–50% for elk. A 115 lb field-dressed deer gives roughly **50–55 lb** of meat, and a 400 lb elk about **170–200 lb**.

From Field to Freezer

Field-dressed weight is the animal after gutting, with the hide, head, and legs still on. For deer, that's about 78% of the whole animal. From there the hide, head, lower legs, bones, fat, and any damaged meat come off, and what's left is the lean meat you take home.

Researchers at the University of Wyoming found boneless cuts averaged 48% of field-dressed weight for mule deer, or 43 to 44% if the thin rib and flank meat was left out. For elk it was 50% in their lab, but 43% at a commercial locker plant processing hunters' elk. Ohio's wildlife agency weighed 115 whitetails and got 48.5%.

Animal	Average field-dressed	Boneless meat (about)
Whitetail deer	115 lb	50–55 lb
Mule deer	107 lb	45–50 lb
Elk	384 lb	165–190 lb
Moose	666 lb	265–310 lb

Average weights are from North Dakota State University. Bigger animals are common here: Washington's wildlife department lists mule deer bucks up to 250 lb live, and Shiras moose bulls at 850 to 1,100 lb.

What Changes Your Yield

Shot placement

Bloodshot and damaged meat gets trimmed. In the Wyoming mule deer study, a single hit in the hind leg or shoulder cut the yield by about 2 to 3 percentage points. Extension guidance for lead bullets is to trim at least 4 inches around the bullet's path.

Care in the field

The Wyoming researchers traced the locker plant's lower yield to shot damage, trim lost to dirt and flies, and fat. Getting the carcass cool, clean, and dry fast saves meat. See bringing your deer or elk to the processor.

Fat and silverskin

Deer fat often has a strong taste, so it's usually trimmed off. That makes venison very lean, and it means fewer pounds than a similar-sized beef or hog.

Bone-in or boneless

Bone-in cuts weigh more on the scale, but you don't get more meat to eat.

Planning What to Make

Most hunters split their meat between steaks, roasts, and ground, and turn some of it into jerky, snack sticks, or sausage. We make all of those from your game; see game processing and our rates.

Questions? Call Howard & Mia.

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Read it online, with calculators:
handmcustommeat.com/guide/deer-elk-meat-yield/

Sources

Bulletin B-589R: deer carcass care and meat yield, University of Wyoming Extension
https://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B-589R.pdf

Bulletin B-594R: elk carcass care and meat yield, University of Wyoming Extension
https://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B-594R.pdf

Wild Side of the Menu No. 2: Field to Freezer (FN125), NDSU Extension
https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/sites/default/files/2022-09/fn125_0.pdf

Venison Yield, Ohio Division of Wildlife
https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/ohiodnr.gov/documents/wildlife/wild-ohio-harvest-community/Venison%20Yield.pdf

Big Game from Hunt to Home (PNW 517), Oregon State, Washington State, and University of Idaho Extension
https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pnw-517-big-game-hunt-home

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