CUSTOM MEAT GUIDE · STEP 1: BEFORE YOU BUY

Hanging Weight vs. Take-Home Meat

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THE SHORT ANSWER

Hanging weight is what the carcass weighs after slaughter, with the hide, head, feet, and organs removed but the bones still in. You take home roughly **two-thirds of the hanging weight** as packaged meat, or about 40 percent of the animal's live weight. Half of a 1,200 lb steer usually means about 240 lb of meat in your freezer.

Three Weights You'll Hear

Buying a half beef or raising your own, you'll hear three different weights. They describe the same animal at three different stages, which is why the numbers shrink so much.

Live weight

The animal on the hoof, weighed before slaughter. Some ranchers price animals by live weight.

Hanging weight

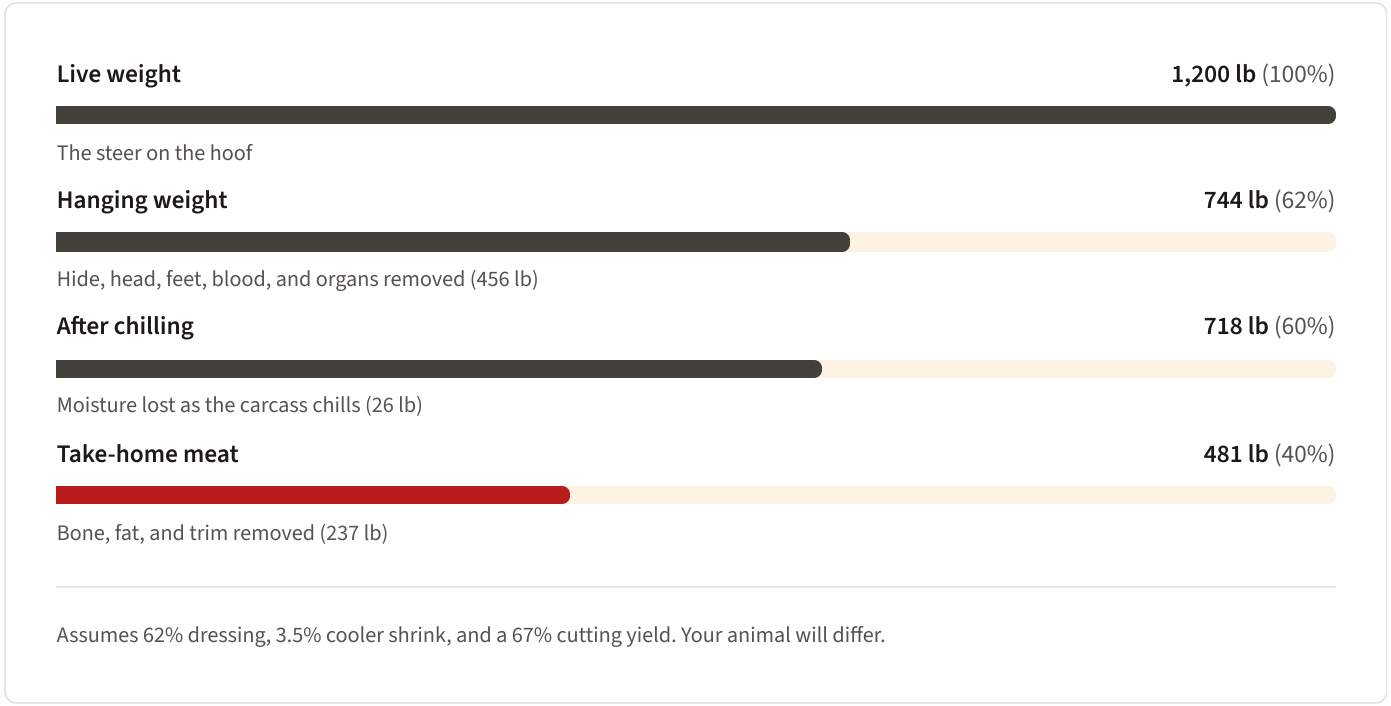
The carcass after slaughter, with bone and fat still in. Also called rail or carcass weight. Our processing rate is based on it.

Take-home weight

The cut, wrapped, and labeled meat you carry out the door. Also called packaged or freezer weight.

Where 1,200 Pounds Goes

Here's a typical 1,200 lb steer from live animal to freezer, using figures from the University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension.



Split in half, that's about **370 lb hanging** and **240 lb of meat** for each half. The Washington State Department of Agriculture's own yield chart lands in the same place: about 68 to 69 percent of a beef quarter comes back as meat, and the rest is bone, fat, and trim.

What Changes Your Take-Home Weight

Bone-in or boneless

Boneless steaks and roasts weigh less on the scale, but you get the same amount of meat to eat. Choosing more bone-in cuts means more pounds in the freezer, not more dinners.

How lean you want it

The more fat that's trimmed away, from steaks or from the ground beef, the fewer pounds you take home.

The animal itself

A well-muscled animal yields more meat than a fat one, and size, grade, and how full its stomach is on slaughter day all move the numbers.

Hanging and aging

A carcass can lose 2 to 5 percent of its weight in the first day alone as it chills. Our beef then typically hangs 14–21 days, which builds tenderness and flavor and dries it a little more along the way.

What you ask to keep

Liver, heart, tongue, soup bones, and fat for rendering are easy to lose track of. If you want any of them, say so when you schedule, before slaughter day.

Hogs Work the Same Way

Hogs dress out higher than cattle, about 70 to 75 percent of live weight with the skin on. Of that hanging weight, about 74 percent comes home with bone-in cuts, or about 65 percent with boneless, closely trimmed cuts. A 250 lb hog works out to roughly 115 to 130 lb of pork.

Hogs are skinned on the farm, so their hanging weight runs a little lower than skin-on figures. Skinning doesn't change how much meat you get.

Why Processing Is Priced on Hanging Weight

Hanging weight is measured before any cutting starts, so it doesn't change with your cut choices. Our beef cut and wrap is **$1.05 per pound of hanging weight**, plus a **$150 kill fee** per head.

For the steer above, that's 744 lb × $1.05 = $781, plus the $150 kill fee: about **$931** to process the whole animal. Spread over 481 lb of meat, processing works out to about **$1.94 per pound** you take home. What you pay the rancher for the animal comes on top of that, and so do extras like smoking or sausage. Farms more than 20 miles from our shop also have a fuel surcharge. See all our rates.

Will It Fit in Your Freezer?

Beef	Packaged meat	Freezer space
Quarter	75–125 lb	2–4 cu ft
Half	150–250 lb	4–8 cu ft
Whole	300–500 lb	9–17 cu ft

Rule of thumb: about 1 cubic foot of freezer space for every 30 to 35 pounds of packaged meat. The freezer planner on our website shows how it fits in your freezer.

Questions? Call Howard & Mia.

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Read it online, with calculators:
handmcustommeat.com/guide/hanging-weight/

Sources

How much meat should a beef animal yield?, University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension
https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/articles/how-much-meat-should-a-beef-animal-yield

How much meat should a hog yield?, University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension
https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/articles/how-much-meat-should-a-hog-yield/

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.