

News Column for Use Week of 5/4/2020
Brett Melton, Extension Agent: Livestock Production
River Valley Extension District
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Filling up your Freezer

For the past several weeks, the meat industry has been facing many challenges. An issue that has trickled down to the consumer, is the slowing of packing plants. This slow down is causing shortages of meat in the market and increasing the price on the shelves. It also creates a backup of finished animals, ready to be harvested.

This situation has led to small-town packing plants becoming inundated with inquires. This is certainly not going to solve the issue with the backup of large feeding operations. However, I want to provide some information to people who want to fill up their freezer, as I have received several calls from cattle producers and consumers about getting a half or quarter of beef.

A question some people may be wondering and one I have received recently is, “How much meat do I get when I buy a half-beef or a quarter-beef?” Obviously, this requires a large freezer. A typical kitchen freezer is not going to be nearly big enough. To breakdown how much beef is in a half beef for example, we first need to know how much the animal weighs. We know that the average hanging hot carcass is about 63% of the live weight. This is also known as the dressing percentage. An average hot carcass weight would be about 800 pounds (this can vary widely from 600 to 1100). However, not all 800 pounds of that hanging weight will end up on your plate. The first thing we must consider is about a 3% shrink from moisture loss and cutting on the carcass. That leaves about a 776-pound-carcass. Typically, we would see about 168 pounds (21%) of that 776-pound carcass as inedible product, such as bone and excess fat. Which would leave us with roughly 600 pounds of steaks, roasts, ground beef, and stew meat.

One resource that is available to consumers buying meat is the River Valley Extension District web page, www.rivervalley.ksu.edu. On the website under the Livestock and Food, Nutrition, and Health pages, there are three documents from Kansas State Meat Science. These three documents show you what your options are for getting your beef, pig, or lamb cut up and how many pounds of each cut you can expect.

Another question to add is, “How much money can I save by buying a half or quarter-beef?” This question is difficult to answer. The easy part to answer is how much are you going to be paying for your half-beef. The hard part is figuring out an estimated retail value of the carcass. In other words, how much would it cost you to go buy those same cuts of beef from the shelf at your local grocery store? First, we have to breakdown how much each of those cuts would cost us at a retail store. Then, we must know how many pounds of each of those cut there will be. I have created a spreadsheet that is available on the River Valley Extension District webpage. It allows you to enter the live or carcass weight of your beef and will give you an estimate of how much of each cut you should receive in return. You can also enter the retail price of each cut. I have put in some prices, but they may not reflect what you would pay. Prices change frequently on meat, especially if a store has had something on the shelf for a while, they will put it on sale.

Contact River Valley Extension District Livestock Agent, Brett Melton at 785-243-8185 or bmelton@ksu.edu with questions.

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