

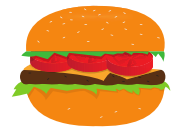
# How to buy a whole animal

Buying whole animals direct from the farm allows you to choose the quality of meat that you like, as well as how it was raised, fed, finished, and even cut and packaged. We are lucky in central Illinois as there are many choices: grass-fed or grain-finished? Certified organic or conventional? How about a heritage livestock breed? There are a lot of options!

## Common Terms

**Live weight/ On the hoof:** this refers to the actual weight of the animal while it is alive. A typical grass-fed cow weighs about 1000lbs.

**Hanging weight:** Once the animal is slaughtered however, the skin, head, non-usable organs, hooves and all other inedible parts are removed, and the carcass is hung to age. The weight of the carcass that remains is referred to the "hanging weight", which is usually around 60% of the live weight. The hanging weight of a typical 1000lb grass-fed cow is about 600lbs.



**Take home/Boxed/Retail weight:** After aging, the animal is processed into individual retail cuts. The weight after this process is called the "boxed", "take home", or "retail" weight. The retail weight will be significantly less than the hanging weight. Typically, the retail weight is about 60% of the hanging weight, so if you've got a cow with a hanging weight of 600lbs, your actual retail weight will be close to 360lbs. However, the percentage varies based on a number of factors including:



- **Bone-in vs. boneless** – This will dramatically affect yield; the more boneless cuts that are made, the lower the retail weight. It will not however significantly affect the actual amount of meat you receive.
- **The amount of fat remaining on the meat cuts** – The retail weight will vary based on how much surface fat the cutter leaves on the cuts. More fat means a higher retail weight.
- **Leanness of ground meat** – If the ground meat is made very lean the yield will be less than if the ground is made with a higher percentage of fat. Again, a higher percentage of fat means a higher retail weight.

## What does it cost?

Because the retail weight varies depending on how the animal is processed, most farmers set the price/lb on the hanging weight. For example, a typical grass-fed cow weighs about 1,000 lbs. on the hoof, which yields about 600 lbs. of hanging weight. If you purchase half a cow, you will be purchasing 300lbs of the hanging weight. If the farmer charges \$6.00/lb on the hanging weight, that will cost \$1800 (300lbs x \$6.00). However, once the hanging weight is processed into individual cuts, you'll be left with about 180lbs of meat, or the retail weight. If your total cost is \$1800 and you anticipate 180lbs of meat, the actual cost is \$10.00/lb on the retail weight (\$1800/180lbs). This price applies to every cut, so one pound of ground beef will cost the same as one pound of filet mignon.

## Additional fees

When a farmer takes an animal to the butcher, they are charged a couple of different fees, including:



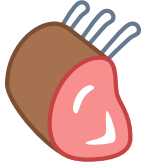
- A slaughter fee or kill fee
- Cut & wrap (cutting and packaging your meat)
- Processing (making any of the cuts into bacon, sausage, jerky, etc.).

Many farmers will include the slaughter fee and cut and wrap fee in the price of the hanging weight, and you will be asked to pay any additional processing fees if you would like to create special value-added products, like bacon. But not every farmer does it that way. It's always good to ask your farmer up front what is included in the hanging weight price, and how much processing typically costs.

# How to buy a whole animal

## How long will my purchase last?

Here you have to do a little math.

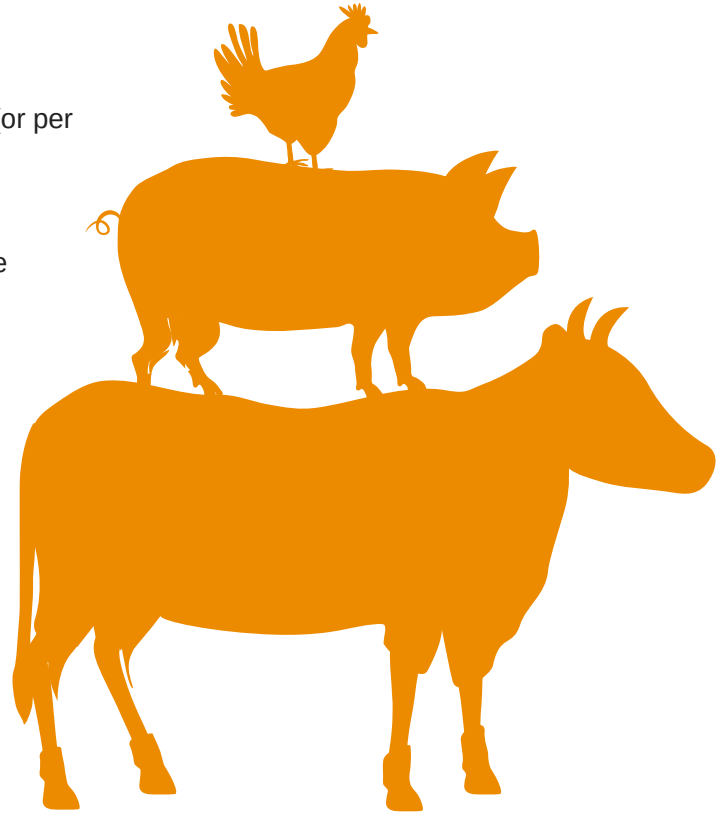


- How many people are in your family?
- How often does your family eat meat?
- What is the average amount of meat per meal (or per person)?

If you have a family of 4, and you eat beef twice a week, and at each meal, each family member eats .5lb of beef, then you'll use an average of 4lbs of beef each week. At that rate, a half cow with a retail weight of 180lbs would last your family approximately 45 weeks (or almost an entire year!).

## How much freezer space do I need?

As a general guide, 100 lbs. of meat (about 1/4 of a typical beef cow) will take up a full freezer in the average home refrigerator. A chest or upright freezer might be a good option if you are thinking of buying a quarter or half a cow.



## Pros and Cons?

### Pros:

- **Transparency:** Buying direct from a farmer gives you the opportunity to choose meat that was raised in a way that aligns with your values.
- **Long-term savings:** When you buy in bulk (quarters, halves and wholes) you're paying the same price per pound regardless of the cut. That means you pay the same price for ground beef as you do for filet mignon!
- **Customize it!** You get to choose your favorite cuts. Thinly sliced ribeyes for sandwiches or thick ribeye steaks? Showstopping bone-in leg of lamb or an easy weeknight boneless leg roast? You decide!
- **That personal touch:** When you buy meat in bulk, you have the opportunity to form a relationship with a local farmer and keep your food dollars in your local community.

### Cons:

- **Up-Front Investment:** Buying whole, half, and quarter animals requires a hefty up-front investment.
- **Paying for parts unknown:** In addition, you'll also be paying for cuts of meat you might not necessarily purchase---like liver, kidneys, and tongue. Knowing how to use all of the different cuts might require a little creativity or research.



## Where do I start?

Check out the Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Illinois Directory at [www.buyfreshbuylocalcentralillinois.org](http://www.buyfreshbuylocalcentralillinois.org). Read the listings from each farm to find out how they raise their livestock and contact them individually via phone or email for specific pricing and any other questions. There are many options to choose from, so shop around and see what fits your needs.