Beef is an American favorite. Each of us spends about 15 percent of our disposable income for food, with about one-third of each food dollar going for meat, fish, and poultry. The most popular meat is beef. In one year, each American eats about 58 pounds of cooked beef.

**Nutritional Value**
Beef is nutritious and versatile. Whether the choice is a quick-cooking steak or more economical ground beef or pot roast, beef is a satisfying source of important nutrients.

Protein, phosphorus, iron, zinc, and vitamins, especially B6 (pyridoxine) and B12, are all found in beef. Beef liver is also a valuable source of vitamin A.

All meats, including beef, contain cholesterol. It is in both the lean and fat portions. The amount in lean beef is about the same as in chicken and pork, 71 to 73 milligrams per 3-ounce serving. Shrimp (132 mg per serving) has more cholesterol than other meats, while flounder (52 mg) and turkey (62 mg) have slightly less than other meats. The highest concentration of cholesterol in beef is found in the liver.

**Beef Prices**
The price of a pound of beef varies according to national supply, time of year, grade, cut, and size of purchase. Price competition from pork, poultry, and fish also affects beef prices.

When beef supplies increase, prices drop; when supplies decrease, prices rise. Therefore, in normal years, beef prices drop during the fall months, begin increasing in late spring, and reach their peak in the summer.

Shoppers will pay the most money for high quality cuts such as rib and loin. Steak, roasts, and stew meat from the chuck and round are priced less per pound but are usually less tender and require more preparation.

Ground beef is usually the least expensive beef product because it can be made from carcasses that are not tender enough to yield desirable steaks and roasts. Some consumers who are calorie conscious buy extra-lean ground beef instead of regular ground beef because they think it contains much fewer calories.

However, researchers have found there is a difference of only about 9 calories per quarter-pound patty. They also found that even though there is a difference in the amount of fat in the raw meat, there is not much difference after cooking. Regular ground beef loses more fat, while the extra-lean ground beef loses more water.

Finally, taste tests indicated that hamburgers made from regular ground beef were juicier and tastier than those made from extra-lean ground beef.

Chuck roasts can often be found at sale prices. They may have an identifying blade or arm bone or be boneless. Chuck roasts come from the shoulder area and are not as tender as steaks from the loin. Cooking slowly in a liquid will help tenderize these cuts.

Some people find it convenient to buy a beef quarter or half and store it in the freezer. This can be an advantage only if your family will eat all the cuts included in the package. It may be more economical to stock up on favorite cuts when they are sale priced.

However, you should have freezer space and a flexible budget before you stock up on meats. Paying for a rented locker or paying interest on an overdue credit bill can erase any possible savings on sale-priced beef.

**How Much to Buy**
The weight of most meat products is given in decimals instead of fractions or pounds and ounces. For example, the label on a roast may state that the net weight is 4.5 pounds. This means it is 4 ½ pounds or 4 pounds and 8 ounces, not 4 pounds and 5 ounces. The standard serving size for beef is 2 to 3 ounces of lean, boneless, cooked meat. Cooked weight is different from purchased weight. Notice also that the recommended serving size is for lean meat. Fat and gristle are included in the purchase weight.

**Beef Cuts**
A beef carcass is first cut into halves, then each half is divided into 10 wholesale cuts—chuck, rib, short loin, sirloin, round, fore shank, brisket, short plate, flank, and tip sections. Finally, the wholesale cuts are divided into the many retail cuts you see in the grocery store.

Because of the many differences in the ages and genetic backgrounds of animals at slaughter, tenderness and other factors vary more in beef than in pork or lamb. However, regardless of the quality of the meat, some cuts of beef are naturally more tender than others. Cuts from the less-used muscles along the back of the animal—the rib and loin sections—are always more tender than those from the active muscles such as the chuck, flank, and round sections.
True Cost
Cost per pound is not a true guide to the best buy in beef because some cuts have more bone and fat loss than others. The best way to compare costs of meat is on a cost per serving basis.

Liver, with little cooking shrinkage and no bone loss, provides five servings to the pound. Boneless steaks, roasts, and round steaks provide three. Cuts with a high proportion of bone (T-bone and rib cuts) provide two servings per pound, and cuts with a lot of bone provide one to one and a half servings to the pound. For the true cost, simply divide the number of servings into the cost per pound.

Meat Labels
Several years ago the meat industry developed a labeling system that standardizes the labels used on meat products. Under these guidelines, each cut should be labeled to show where it came from on the animal. The label should specify: 1) the animal; 2) the retail cut—blade roast, chops, etc.; and 3) the wholesale cut—chuck, rib, loin, or round.

Uniform meat labeling takes the guesswork out of shopping. It discourages the use of specialty names like New York strip steak or Denver roast. However, the program is voluntary, and individual stores can decide whether to use the standardized labels.

Cooking Beef
Choosing the best cooking method can be confusing when buying boneless cuts. Cuts from the chuck and round usually require moist heat to tenderize them; those from the loin or rib are usually tender enough to broil or roast in an open pan. Most meat markets provide the name of the wholesale cut.

Storing Beef
Fresh beef must be stored properly to preserve its quality. Store fresh beef in the coldest part of the refrigerator or in the compartment designed for storing meat. Leave the meat in its original package. Fresh meat usually keeps best if loosely wrapped, however, the transparent wrap on prepackaged beef is designed for refrigerator storage at home for a few days.

If stored properly, most fresh beef can be kept in the refrigerator for three to five days. However, variety meats, ground beef, and stew meat are highly perishable and can be safely stored in the refrigerator for only one to two days. Cured beef, frankfurters, wieners, and smoked sausage can be kept seven days when properly stored, and dry and semi-dry sausage can be kept two to three weeks. Fresh meat can be kept longer when held at 32 degrees F. Meat freezes at 28.6 degrees F.

If beef is to be stored for more than the recommended time, it should be frozen. Store it at 0 degrees F or below in moisture- and vapor-resistant wrapping. The thin wrapper in which meat is packaged in the store is not moisture- or vapor-resistant.

For further information about beef and other meats, ask your county Extension agent for these publications:
- ANR-137, “Buying Beef for the Freezer”
- HE-16c, “Freezing Meat for Best Quality”

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county’s name to find the number.

William R. Jones, Extension Animal Scientist, Professor, Animal Sciences, Auburn University

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