

# Stretch Your Food Dollar With Lamb

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Lamb is noted for the delicate flavor, tenderness, and versatility that it can add to menus. Its popularity is evident because of frequent features for gourmet dining at home and in restaurants and hotels. Lamb cuts are available throughout the year. Thus, lamb lends its appealing characteristics to meals for many occasions.

One can “stretch” the food dollar by purchasing the larger lamb cuts. Quantity purchase alternatives include the whole carcass, side, foresaddle, hindsaddle, and primal cuts such as the shoulder, rack, loin, and leg. In addition, retail cuts can be purchased in quantity. A home freezer permits additional shopping flexibility so that the consumer can take advantage of advertised specials on retail cuts or lower prices through the purchase of primal cuts.

If one elects to purchase a large quantity of lamb for the home freezer, an inventory of available freezer space will determine the amount that can be purchased. Freezer space required for frozen meat can vary from 35-50 pounds per cubic foot, depending on how it is wrapped, amount of bone, and shape of the cut. When evaluating the benefits of large quantity purchases and freezer storage of lamb, one should recognize that the energy cost for storage of meat in a typical home freezer, with 50% of the freezer space designated for red meats, is currently about \$0.10 per pound per year. This cost, plus any maintenance and finance costs, should be compared to potential per-pound savings through quality purchases. This potential savings is normally at least \$0.10 per pound and will approximate \$1.50 per pound for some of the expensive lamb chops. It is important that the individual investigate the potential increased storage costs and decreased purchase costs and decide if large quantity purchases are appropriate.

## A Lamb Is Not All Chops

When figuring the costs of larger cuts of lamb, one should recognize that the price normally quoted is on a carcass weight basis. This price may appear low when compared to retail prices since it includes bone and fat which must be removed. The fact that a lamb is not all chops is verified by the following illustrations:

Typical live weight = 120 lbs.  
 Carcass weight = 60 lbs. (50% of live weight)  
 Saleable retail cuts = 42 lbs. (70% of carcass weight)  
 Fat and bones = 18 lbs. (30% of carcass weight)

Saleable retail cuts from a typical lamb would be approximately:

From the leg (approximately 10 pounds per leg)  
 Sirloin Chops = 3 lbs.  
 Frenched or American Leg = 11 lbs.  
 Fat and Bone = 6 lbs.

From the Flank (approximately 1 pound per flank)  
 Lamb Stew = .5 lb.  
 Ground Lamb = 1 lb.  
 Fat and Bone = .5 lb.

From the Loin (approximately 4 pounds per loin)  
 Loin Chops = 6 lbs.  
 Ground Lamb = .5 lb.  
 Lamb Stew = .5 lb.  
 Fat and Bone = 1 lb.

From the Rack (approximately 4 pounds per rack)  
 Rack Chops = 6 lbs.  
 Riblets = 1 lb.  
 Fat and Bone = 1 lb.

From the Shank (approximately .5 pounds per shank)  
 Lamb Shanks = 1 lb.

From the Breast (approximately 2 pounds per breast)  
 Boneless Rolled Breast = 2 lbs.  
 Fat and Bone = 2 lbs.

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From the Shoulder (approximately 8 pounds per shoulder)

Blade Chops	= 1 lb.
Arm Chops	= 1 lb.
Ground Lamb	= 1 lb.
Rolled Shoulder	= 8 lbs.
Fat and Bone	= 5 lbs.

## Lamb Is A Value

Lamb is a value because it is a nutrient-dense food. It has built-in nutrients that maintain human health and well-being. On the basis of recommended daily allowances, a serving of 3 ounces of lamb supplies approximately 84% of the protein, 34% of the iron, 45% of the phosphorus, 15% of the vitamin B, 27% of the vitamin B, 65% of the niacin, 30% of the riboflavin, and 25% of the thiamin that an average person needs daily, while supplying only 15% of the recommended number of calories.

If food budgets tighten, saving money at the supermarket becomes especially important. It is important to know how to purchase wholesale lamb cuts and fabricate them at home or how to request the meat cutter in the store to cut and package these cuts. Purchase of wholesale cuts can save the consumer up to \$1.50 per pound over buying the customary individually wrapped retail cuts. By purchasing wholesale cuts such as the rack, loin, shoulder, or leg, one can lower the food bill. Less costly cuts such as those from the breast, shank, or shoulder provide the same nutrients as the more expensive cuts.

## Meat Cutting

### Equipment Needed

A meat saw, boning knife, and butcher knife are needed if one elects to reduce larger cuts to chops and roasts. It is also desirable to have one or more large polyethylene cutting boards available to provide a suitable cutting and boning surface. If boneless cuts are tied, twine is essential. A white, moisture-vapor-proof freezer paper is needed to wrap the fabricated cuts. This equipment may be purchased at many hardware stores.

### The Various Cuts

Figure 1 illustrates how lamb wholesale cuts are separated from the carcass. After learning how various wholesale cuts are converted to retail cuts, one can tell the retail meat cutter how to have these retail cuts fabricated and can do some of the cutting oneself. Even with an additional cost per pound added for the retailer's cutting, one can still obtain a real bargain. Figure 2 reflects various retail cuts that may be obtained from wholesale cuts of the lamb carcass. Descriptions of the cutting techniques follow. Also, knowing the terminology used by the meat retailer will help one purchase wholesale and retail cuts.

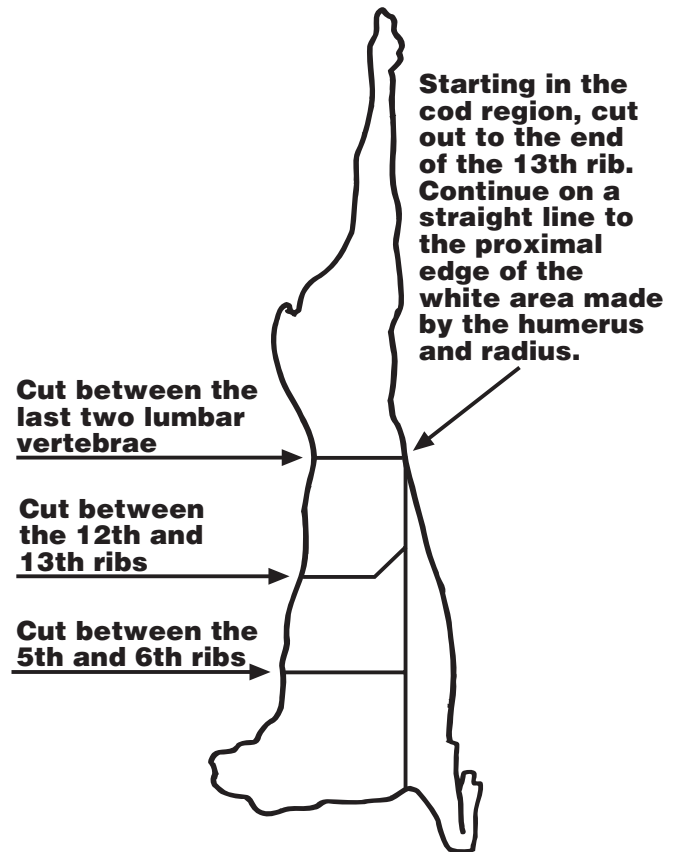


Figure 1. Fabricating instructions for a lamb carcass

**Leg Cuts-** The leg of lamb is one of the true value cuts, since chops can be cut from the sirloin end which is tender. A high ratio of lean to fat is found in this cut which is tender enough to be broiled or baked. The leg can be purchased with the sirloin included or removed (see Figure 2). The sirloin can be boned and served as a boneless sirloin roast. The shank portion can be removed and become a roast, or it can be sliced the desired thickness into leg slices by making the cut perpendicular to the direction of the fibers and leg bone. Leg center slices may be removed from the leg by cutting perpendicular to the round bone at the cut surface. The leg can also be cut into a French-Style leg (Figure 2), American-Style leg by removing the hind shank, or boned and converted to a boneless rolled leg.

**Flank Cuts-** Lamb cutlets or lamb stew may be removed from the flank (see Figure 2). The fat, connective tissue, and 13th rib should be separated from the lean which can be converted to ground lamb.

**Loin Cuts-** The easiest and most effective way to convert the loin into loin chops is to cut to the desired thickness by starting at the large sirloin end. If any of the tail portion is trimmed, the lean can be converted to lamb stew or ground lamb.

# RETAIL CUTS OF LAMB

WHERE THEY COME FROM AND HOW TO COOK THEM



\* Lamb for stew or grinding may be made from any cut.

\*\* Kabobs or cubed steaks may be made from any thick solid piece of boneless Lamb.

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**Rack Cuts-** Riblets can be removed from the end of the rack that has the exposed cut surface of the rib bones. A rib roast may be cut from the rack. The rack can also be cut into rib chops.

**Breast Cuts-** If this wholesale cut is purchased, riblets may be removed from the edge with the exposed cut surface of the rib bones. The remainder of the breast should be boned and converted to ground lamb. The breast is frequently boned and converted to a rolled breast or an incision is made at the rib ends and it is prepared as a stuffed breast.

**Shank Cuts-** The shank is most frequently prepared as a bone-in lamb shank, frequently barbecued.

**Shoulder Cuts-** The arm portion of the shoulder where the shank is removed may be cut into arm chops. This cut is made perpendicular to the arm bone. Blade chops may be removed by cutting the desired thickness at the cut surface where the rack was removed. The shoulder is frequently served as a square shoulder roast or boned and converted to a boneless, rolled shoulder. The neck is normally converted to neck slices.

## **Packaging**

To properly wrap retail cuts, choose a moisture-vapor-proof freezer wrap to seal-out air and lock-in moisture. Pliable wraps like aluminum foil, freezer paper, and plastic wrap are good choices for bulky, irregular-shaped cuts since they can be molded to the shape of a cut. The following wrapping technique is recommended:

Place the cut in the center of the wrapping material. When several cuts are packaged together, place a double thickness of freezer wrap between them for easier separation.

Bring the edges of the wrap together over the cut. Fold over at least twice, pressing the wrap closely to the cut to force out air.

Smooth the ends of the wrap, creasing edges to form triangles. Double-fold the ends toward the package to seal out air.

Fold the ends under the package and seal with a continuous strip of freezer tape. Label with the name of the cut, number of servings, and date of freezing.

## **Freezing Guidelines**

Bulk lamb purchases should be frozen quickly. For those who must do their own freezing, no more than 10% of

the capacity of a home freezer, wrapped in no more than one-cubic-foot quantities, should be frozen at one time. Freezing does not improve the taste or overall acceptability of lamb. It merely preserves the condition at the time of freezing. Frozen lamb should be stored in the freezer at a constant 0°F (-18°C) or colder. To preserve the fresh lamb flavor, it should not be stored in the freezer for more than one year; ground lamb should not be kept more than nine months.

## **Cooking Frozen Lamb**

Lamb may be cooked frozen or defrosted. Defrosted lamb should be cooked as a fresh cut; but allow additional cooking time. Frozen roasts require approximately 1/3 more time for cooking. Cooking time for frozen chops varies according to surface area, thickness, and broiling temperature. Frozen cuts should be broiled farther from the heat so they do not brown too quickly.

## **Defrosting Lamb**

Frozen lamb may be defrosted before or during cooking. It should be defrosted in the original wrapping in the refrigerator. Defrosting meat at room temperature is not a recommended procedure. The following is a timetable for defrosting frozen lamb in a refrigerator:

Large roast	= 4-5 hours (per pound)
Small roast	= 3-4 hours (per pound)
Chops	= 8-12 hours

## **Lamb Is Wholesome**

The protein of a 3-ounce serving of cooked lamb (lean and marble) contains all of the essential amino acids necessary to build, maintain, and repair body tissues and to increase their resistance to infection and diseases. The mineral iron, together with high-quality protein, is vital in the formation and maintenance of red blood and in the prevention of anemia. Since protein is not stored in the body, protein foods should be included in every meal each day. Lamb is a readily digestible and highly utilized food.

## **Summary**

Lamb is a value. Through purchase of a carcass or wholesale cuts, savings may be realized and you can **STRETCH** your food dollar. Comparable information related to savings from quantity purchases is found in VCE Publication 458-921, "How To S-T-R-E-T-C-H Your Pork Dollar," and in VCE Publication 458-003, "How To 'BEEF' Up Your Food Dollar."