

What Can I Expect from a Freezer Lamb?

By Betsy Hodge, CCE St. Lawrence and NCRAT

We recently held a lamb cutting and cooking workshop at the CCE Kitchen in Canton. Ray Butler expertly demonstrated the different cuts while patiently answering our questions. The information we collected by weighing “parts” along the way is shared in this article along with weights I collected from my last freezer lamb. Many thanks to Ray Butler (he’s a meat cutter and beef producer with a few sheep) and Joe Briggs (from Little Joe’s Butcher Shop in Crary Mills) for their help and enthusiasm. MacKenzie Waro, our regional meat processing and marketing specialist also assisted in making the day a success, taking notes, pictures and weighing parts.

Here is an example of a hair lamb I had butchered for my own use from my hair flock:

The numbers you are seeing here are from me weighing the cuts in my garage as I put them into my freezer. I was just using a kitchen scale so I wouldn’t get too excited about the accuracy but it gives you an idea what to expect. I had the legs made into steaks instead of roasts because I find them easier to use on my schedule. This does not include any organs or the tongue and I suspect the neck meat is in the grind.

95 lb lamb (6 and a half months old)

Ground =	9.7
Rib and Loin Chops =	6.6
Should chops =	4.1
Leg Steaks =	9.6
Shanks =	2.4
Total =	32.4 lbs or 34% of live unshrunk weight

For our lamb cutting and cooking class we started with a 134 pound ram lamb. The lamb was 8 months old and had quite a fleece on him and was not shrunk. As a matter of fact he got a last meal in the morning before he was slaughtered. When comparing carcass weights be careful that you are comparing apples to apples because sometimes the hanging weight includes the head and some organs. When we sold whole lambs to restaurants in New York City they regularly dressed 50% but they had the heads on and various organs still inside. That was the way they wanted them for their market. Most of us do not get the head on or many of the organs so that affects the dressing percentage.

Here’s how the lamb we cut up in the class came out. We weighed the primals and then the cuts. It doesn’t all add up because we showed some different cuts. At the end I tried to add up what you would have gotten back from the butcher. Again, remember we were just using a kitchen scale so weights are close but could be influenced by our skills at balancing a large primal on a little scale!

134 pounds live – unshrunk and with wool on
(3 lbs of fleece and 11 lbs of gut fill at least!)
Equivalent to a 120 pound lamb that has been to market?
Head off.

59 lbs HCW (Hot Carcass Weight) = 44% of live

57 lbs CCW (Cold Carcass Weight) = 42% of live

Primals

Foreshank	
and Breast	3.8
Shoulder	7.9
Rack/Loin	6.1
Leg	9.3
Total	27.1

27.1 lbs (half lamb) x 2 halves = 54.2 lbs (whole lamb) or 40.4 % of live weight

Then we divided the primals up into various cuts listed below. There was some trimming going on so don't expect everything to add up perfectly. I also put some comments and other cuts below each section.

Forequarter: 12.7 lbs

Neck = 1.25

Belly = 2.2

Shoulder = 7.9

Foreshank = 1.4

The belly could be trimmed up for ground or stew or little sections of riblets.

Then Ray made a nice boneless shoulder roast which weighed 2.2 pounds.

Ray also showed us how to make little steaks called chuck eyes (.5 lbs)

Rack/Loin: 6.1 lbs

Loin = 2.9

Rack (ribs) = 3.0

Loin Chops added up to 2.3 lbs when we cut up the loin.

We also frenched the ribs and that weighed 1.6 when done.

Hindquarter: 9.3 lbs

Retail ready leg = 8.1 lbs

Hind Shank = 1.2 lbs

Ray also boned out the leg so we could compare it to bone in and it weighed 4.75 lbs

Trim: = 3.3 lbs (fat, gristle)

Stew Meat = 0.6 lbs

Scrap = 7.55 lbs (could be ground)

Total = ~28 lbs retail cuts if you do basic cuts from half a lamb (ground, stew, neck, fore shank, boneless shoulder roast, loin and rib chops, retail ready leg and hind shank). The scrap and stew and trim came from doing the frenched ribs, boneless shoulder, finer trimming, trimming the belly, etc. It is not uncommon for customers to have the neck meat removed and put into ground as well.

28 pounds (half a lamb so multiply by 2 to get 56 lbs) is about 42% of live weight (unshrunk weight).

Notes: If the lamb was shrunk before butchering he would probably have weighed 120 pounds and his retail percentage would be a little higher. Keep in mind that these weights include bone in cuts except for the boneless shoulder roast. If you have your lamb cuts boned out the yield will be less pounds but about the same amount of meat. So if you are pricing your cuts to sell at the farmers market you should charge more per pound for boneless cuts. The weights of the cuts can vary because of different butchering and packaging styles as well.