

# RETAIL CUT IDENTIFICATION

## A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Retail identification can be confusing to beginners. This is one area where students must continuously review to familiarize themselves with various retail cuts.

- It is a good idea for the leader to contact a local supermarket meat manager to see if the team can use their store to practice retail cut identification. It would be beneficial to see a beef carcass or primals cut into retail cuts at a meat market. Students will learn faster if they understand the wholesale cuts of each species and see where they originate from on a carcass. Variety meats may also be found in meat markets.
- Two keys to successful identification are as follows:
  1. Determine the species (beef, pork, or lamb). There are several differences in the three species.
    - Color of lean. Beef is usually a bright, cherry-red color. Color varies from light, bright red to a dark red. Pork lean varies from greyish-pink to greyish-red, while lamb cuts vary from a light, reddish-pink to a brick red.
    - Type of fat. Beef fat is usually firm and white, cream-white, or possibly slightly yellow in color. Pork fat tends to be white and greasy, while lamb fat is often brittle and chalk-white in appearance.
    - Size of cut. Beef cuts are large in size, while the same cuts from pork and lamb are usually half the size of beef. Lamb tends to produce the smallest cuts.
  2. Determine the wholesale origin of the retail cut. There are seven basic groups of retail cuts: leg, round, and ham cuts; sirloin cuts; loin cuts; rib cuts; blade cuts; arm cuts; and breast, brisket, and short plate cuts.
    - Bone structure can sometimes be the easiest way to identify a cut. Many cuts are named by the bones contained in the cuts, and they indicate where the cuts originated from on the carcass. The shape of bones is similar in all three species, with the size of each bone varying with both age and species.
    - Muscle structure can also help identify a cut. For this reason, it can be very useful to understand muscle structure and how the shape of muscles differs in various cuts. Studying retail cut charts is often helpful to becoming familiar with muscle structure.

## B. WHOLESALE ORIGIN

**1. ROUND, LEG, AND HAM REGION**

Round, leg, and ham cuts are from the hind leg. Center cuts from the leg contain the leg bone (femur). The four major muscle groups include the tip (knuckle), top (inside) round or leg, bottom (outside) round or leg, and the eye of round or leg.

The whole loin can be broken down into the sirloin and short loin regions, producing sirloin cuts and short loin cuts. Many times the short loin cuts are simply referred to as loin cuts.

**2. SIRLOIN REGION**

Sirloin cuts originate from the area of the loin that is closest to the round. The two bones found in these cuts are the backbone and the hip bone. Important major muscles include the top sirloin, tenderloin, and the bottom sirloin.

The hip bone has many different shapes as steaks are cut along the length of the sirloin, so the shape of the bone many times names the cut. Wedge bone sirloin steaks result from a wedge-shaped bone in cuts nearest to the round or leg. The next steaks cut have a round bone, indicated by their name, round bone sirloin steaks. Flat bone steaks have the widest section of the hip bone, while pin bone steaks contain the front end of the hip bone.

**3. LOIN (SHORT LOIN) REGION**

Loin (short loin) cuts contain the back bone. The back bone in these cuts can be further broken down into the spine, chine, and finger bones. In addition, one top loin steak carries the 13th rib. The three major muscles of concern include the loin eye or top loin, the tenderloin, and the flank (abdominal muscles).

Sometimes the tenderloin is removed before the short loin is separated from the sirloin and is sold as tenderloin steaks. This leaves the top loin steaks to be cut from the short loin. If the tenderloin is present, however, it differentiates the rest of the steaks cut from the loin. The tenderloin in T-bone steaks must be at least one-half inch in width, whereas the tenderloin in Porterhouse steaks must be at least one and one-fourth inches across. Additionally, Porterhouse steaks usually contain a third muscle, known as the Gluteus medius.

**4. RIB REGION**

Rib cuts from the rib region contain the back bone (comprised of the chine and feather bones in this instance) and the rib bone. Usually the chine bone is removed from steaks from the rib. Beef ribeye steaks differ from rib steaks in that ribeye steaks are boneless versions of rib steaks. The main muscle to identify is the ribeye.

A pork butterfly chop is a boneless rib chop that is cut thick enough to be split in the middle, giving the resemblance of butterfly wings. Also, butterfly chops can be cut from the pork loin region if the tenderloin is removed.

The shoulder or chuck produces both blade cuts and arm cuts.

**5. BLADE REGION**

Blade cuts include the blade bone (scapula). The back bone and a portion of the rib bone may be present. The shape of the blade bone varies, depending on where the steak was cut from the shoulder or chuck. It may take the shape of the number seven (7) or it may be straight and flat. Major muscle groups of interest provide the boneless top blade steak, the mock tender, and the boneless chuck eye roast.

**6. ARM REGION**

Arm cuts contain the arm bone (humerus). Cross sections of rib bones may be present. There are many muscles in arm cuts, which run in different directions. For this reason it is not necessary to learn the name and location of all of the various muscles in the arm cuts.

**7. BRISKET, BREAST, AND SHORT PLATE REGION**

Brisket, breast, and short plate cuts contain breast bone and rib bones. Important cuts from this area include the beef brisket, short ribs, pork spareribs and bacon sides (from the belly), and lamb riblets. The beef skirt steak, commonly used for "fajita" meat, also comes from this region.

**C. COOKERY METHOD**

There are two broad categories of meat cookery methods: dry heat or moist heat methods. Some meat cuts may be cooked with either dry heat or moist heat. Tender cuts of meat are usually cooked using dry heat methods, while moist heat and slow cooking softens connective tissue in less tender cuts. In dry heat methods the cut is cooked by direct heat in an uncovered container. In moist heat methods the cut is surrounded by either steam or hot liquid while in a covered container.

<b>Dry Heat Methods</b>	<b>Moist Heat Methods</b>
Roasting	Braising
Broiling	Cooking in liquid
Panbroiling	
Panfrying (Stirfrying)	

To determine which cooking method is preferred, consider the origin of the cut of the meat and the quality of the meat.

Various cuts contain muscles whose tenderness is affected by the function of the muscle. Muscles in the neck and fore and hind limbs, or "locomotive" muscles, are used by the live animal to move and walk, and thus are frequently used. Typically, these muscles exhibit larger muscle fibers and contain more connective tissue. These muscles are less tender than support muscles. Generally, less tender cuts originate from the chuck, foreshank, brisket, and round of beef carcasses, and legs, foreshank, and shoulder from pork and lamb carcasses.

Conversely, muscles in the back region, or "support" muscles, are not exercised to the extent of locomotive muscles. Cuts from the rib, short loin, and sirloin of beef carcasses, the loin of pork carcasses, and the rack and loin of lamb carcasses are more tender, and therefore are more expensive.

**1. ROASTING**

In this method, the meat is surrounded and cooked by heated air. The cut is placed fat side up on a rack in an open roasting pan. A thermometer is inserted in the center of the cut. Do not add water, do not cover, and do not baste. Roast in a 325-325°F oven.

**2. BROILING**

Meat that is broiled is cooked by direct heat from a flame, an electric unit, or hot coals. One inch thick steaks or chops, or patties are placed in an oven or an outdoor grill, about 3-4 inches from the heat source (4-5 inches for thicker cuts). Cook until the meat is brown on one side, and then broil the second side to a desired degree of doneness. Broiling is preferred for cuts at least one inch in thickness. Panbroil cuts that are less than one inch thick.

**3. PANBROILING**

In this method, meat is cooked in an uncovered pan over direct heat. Usually a heavy nonstick frying pan is used to brown meat on both sides. Do not add water or oil, and do not cover. Cook over medium heat, turning occasionally. Remove fat as it accumulates in the pan.

**4. PANFRYING (STIRFRYING)**

This cookery method is similar to panbroiling, but the meat is cooked in fat. The meat is placed in a frying pan with a small amount of fat. Brown the meat on both sides. Do not cover. Cook at a medium temperature until done, turning the cut occasionally.

**5. BRAISING**

Meat is browned on all sides with a small amount of liquid (oil) in a covered dish or deep pan, or wrapped in foil. The drippings are poured off. Cook at a low temperature until the cut is tender.

**6. COOKING IN LIQUID (STEWING)**

Meat is browned on all sides in a small amount of oil. The meat then is covered with liquid, and the dish is covered. Simmer until meat is “fork tender”. Add vegetables if desired.

**D. DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING CARCASS LOCATION OF CUTS**

