

The Basics of the Bovine Meat Carcass and Cuts that can come from it.

I had a hard time coming up with the title for this letter. I want to explain the basics of the bovine meat carcass and the cuts that can come from it. I used the word bovine because this letter applies to both beef and bison.

I will be as simple and clear as possible. However, I have to warn you that this stuff is confusing. Confusing to us but not to butchers. To butchers, it all makes perfect sense. I hope.

Here are a few examples that confuse me.

Everybody knows what a T Bone Steak is.

- A. A "T Bone Steak" is the same as a "Porterhouse Steak" except the Porterhouse has a larger piece of tenderloin in it.

Maybe that seemed simple.

- B. The tenderloin muscle, which is below the rib (the stem of the T), can be a part of the two steaks above or it can be removed and packaged as a tenderloin roast. Or it can be cut into steaks in which case it can be called a "Tenderloin Steak," a "Fillet Mignon," a "Petite Steak" or "Chateaubriand." Getting a little messier, isn't it?

- C. The large muscle in a T Bone Steak, the muscle on the opposite side of the stem, is the short loin. If that chunk of short loin is cut from the bone as a separate steak it can be called a "New York Strip", a "Strip Steak", a "Kansas City Strip", a "Delmonico", an "Ambassador Steak", a "Boneless Steak", a "Shell Steak" or a "Short Loin Steak". Now it is getting messy.

If the butcher leaves some bone in the steak, there is an entire new set of names.

I do not intend to make you learn that kind of detail. This is the stuff the butcher needs to know.

After you read this letter carefully you should know enough about the carcass and cutting that you can have a good conversation with Nancy at Quality meats and convey what you really want.

Carcass Basics

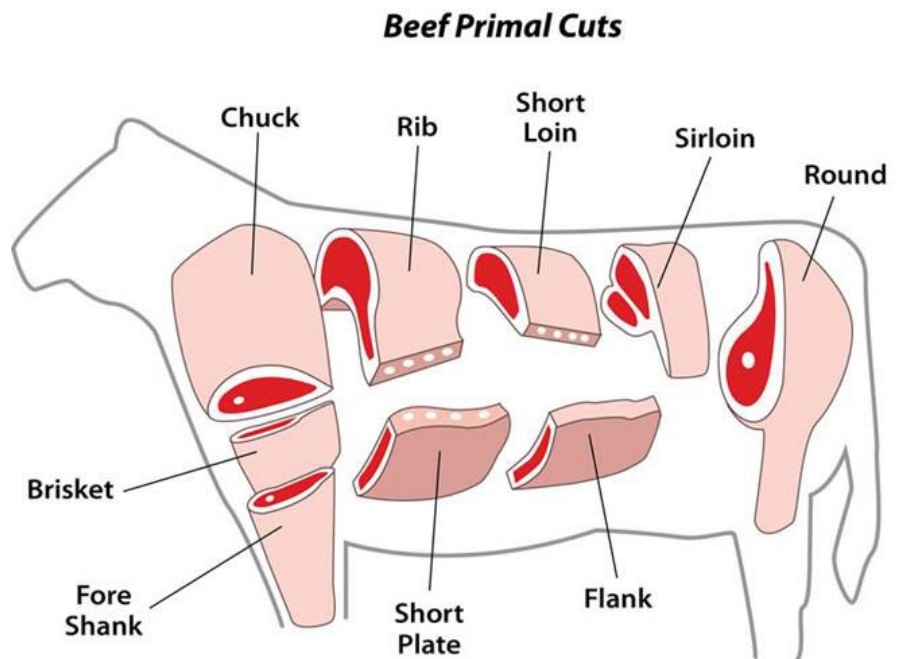
We sell beef and bison by the quarter. When a bovine is butchered, the carcass is cut into four large pieces (quartered) for handling. The first cut with a bone saw is from tail to neck along the center of the spine. That yields two "sides." Then each side is divided into two parts by cutting laterally between the 12th and 13th ribs. This yields two front quarters and two hind quarters. The cuts of meat that can come from the front quarter are different than the cuts from the hind quarter.

By convention and because it works out better for everyone concerned, our quarters are blended when processed. That means everyone gets equal parts of the animal. How you have those parts processed is up to you.

Again, by convention, the carcass is normally divided into "primal" parts. It is important to know the names of those primal parts because butchers use those names to identify cuts. I have pasted a figure below that roughly identifies the primal areas.

Please study that figure. I will use those primal terms from now on.

Often, but not always, a primal term is used in the designation of a cut.



For examples, a “chuck roast” comes from the front top portion (the chuck) of the carcass. A “round roast” comes from the rear leg of the carcass and a “rib roast”; well you get it.

Basic Cuts (see the figure below)

A bovine carcass can be processed into steaks, roasts, stew meat, ground meat, and a few specialty items. Specialty items like ribs, organ meat, soup bones, marrow bones etc.

Chuck

Note: If the words arm, shoulder, or blade are in the cut name, it is from the chuck.

The chuck contains well used muscles and lots of connective tissue.

All chuck cuts require careful cooking to make them tender.

The chuck can provide some good steaks. Flat Iron Steak, Blade Steak. Chuck Eye Steak and others.

More frequently the chuck provides great roasts. Arm Roast, Shoulder Roast, Chuck Eye Roast.

Note: When the word “eye” is used in a cut it means a relatively large, boneless, roughly circular chunk of meat from a single muscle bundle.

Much of the chuck frequently is best converted to stew meat and ground meat.

Brisket.

The brisket is poorly shown in this illustration. Sorry. I picked this illustration because it is pretty good in other ways.

The brisket is actually lower on the animal. It contains the sternum, lots of bone and connective tissue.

The brisket is best made into ground meat although it can be cut as a roast.

Fore Shank.

The front leg shank can be roast, especially if you want a roast with marrow. Otherwise, it is best trimmed for ground meat.

Note: The tenderest parts of the carcass are muscles that are little used. The tenderest steaks come from the rib and short loin areas. Next best is the sirloin region.

Rib.

The rib primal is not really about ribs. It contains some of the tenderest meat in the animal. Great for steaks or roasts.

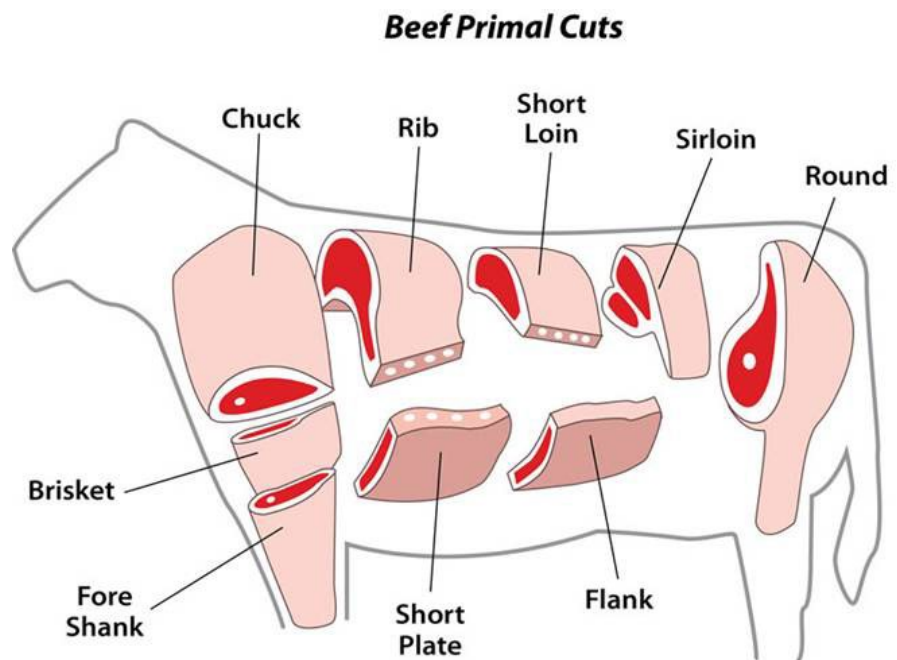
Steaks include the Rib Eye Steak, (remember “Eye” means boneless.) and the Rib Steak (the same cut except boneless).

The roast that comes from the rib primal is the “Prime Rib.” With or without bone.

Short Loin.

The short loin is another tender primal.

The tenderloin muscle is in the short loin. The tenderloin is the tenderest muscle in the carcass. It is inside the rib cage just below the spine.



If cut separately the tenderloin can become a Tenderloin Roast or Tenderloin Steaks, (Filet Mignon).

If left in place the tenderloin is cut as part of T Bone Steaks and Porterhouse Steaks.

If the tenderloin is cut separately, the short loin steaks are Top Loin Steak, or any steak with the word “strip” in it. E.g. New York Strip Steak.

Sirloin.

The sirloin is the source of Sirloin Steaks. An excellent tasting, moderately tender steak.

Round. (aka Rump)

The round primal is actually the massive rear leg of the animal. About 30% of the carcass meat is contained in the round. Good steaks can be cut from the round, but they should be small or tenderized when cut. Round Steak, Minute Steak, Cube Steak.

Round Roasts and Tip Roasts are good. Lots of stew meat and ground meat can be made from the round.

Rear Shank.

There is of course a lower rear leg. Like the fore shank it is most often trimmed for ground meat. It could be used for marrow or soup.

Plate and Flank.

Both parts of the lower side and underbelly of the animal. The plate is in the rib bone region, the flank is similar but from the boneless section of the belly.

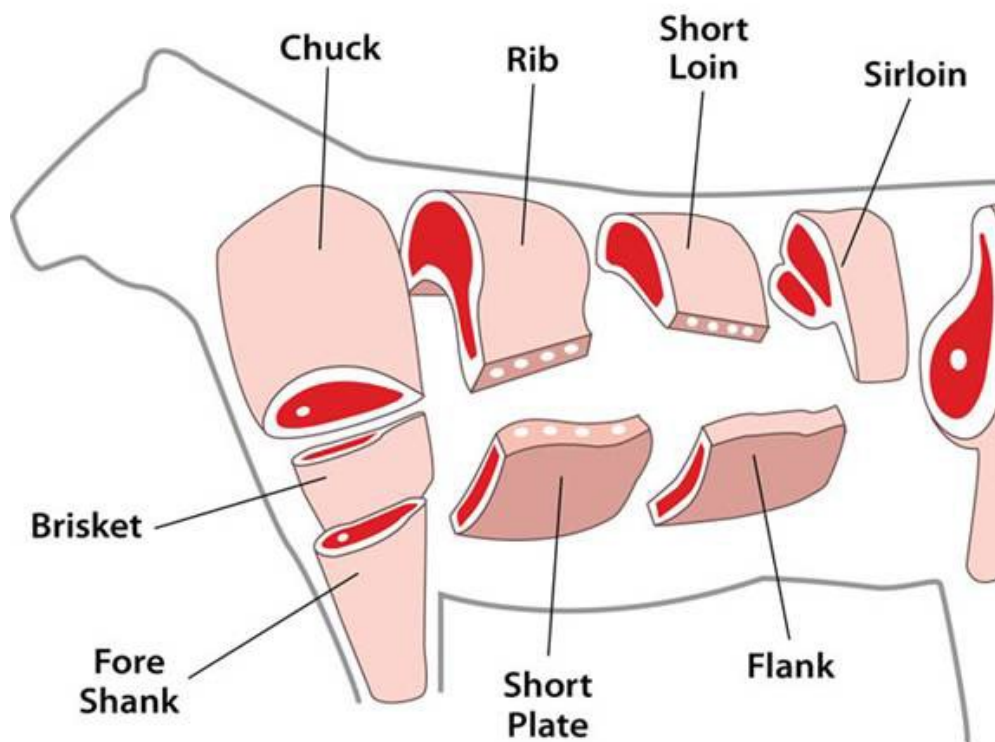
Some popular steaks that require special cooking come from these primals.

Alternatively, they can be trimmed for ground meat.

Ribs, Soup Bones, Broth Bones, and Marrow Bones.

Ask Nancy if you want these. We plan to make soup, broth and marrow bones more easily available from now on.

Beef Primal Cuts



Summary.

It will be helpful if you read the above thoroughly and retain the information.

Many of you will not however.

What you need to remember is that you should have a clear idea of your priorities for your beef.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Best regards.

Tom