

GUIDES · BUYING LOCAL

Stock Your Freezer from Local Farms

How to plan, buy, store, and thaw local meat, so a chest freezer full of local food stays safe and tastes good.

FREE GUIDE

Devlin Foster

Hudson Valley Almanac

Fall 2026

Before you start

Buying local meat in bulk can mean a full freezer, fewer trips to the store, and a direct line to the people who raised your food. But a freezer full of meat is also a small project. You need room, a plan for what you'll eat, and a few habits that keep the food safe and tasty.

This guide covers the part after you decide to buy: how to size your freezer, what to buy, how long things keep, how to pack and label, how to thaw, and what to do in a power outage. For the buying side, see my guide *How to Buy a Share*.

Where the numbers come from. The storage times and power-outage figures below are from USDA food safety guidance. The freezer-space figure is a rule of thumb from a ranch-industry FAQ. Your freezer and your farm's packaging will differ, so treat them as starting points.

In this guide

- 1. Know your freezer
- 2. Decide what and how much to buy
- 3. How long it keeps
- 4. Pack, label, and organize
- 5. Thaw safely
- 6. Have a power-outage plan
- 7. Find the farms

Plan and buy

Start with the freezer you have, then work out what to put in it.

1. Know your freezer

Measure the inside, or check the label for cubic feet. A chest freezer generally holds more than the freezer above a refrigerator, and it wastes less cold air when you open it. One ranch-industry source figures that a cubic foot holds about 35 to 40 pounds of packaged meat. By that rule, a quarter of a beef, at roughly 160 pounds, needs about 5 cubic feet.

Put a freezer thermometer inside. Food stored continuously at **0°F** or below stays safe, according to USDA. If your freezer reads warmer, adjust the dial.

2. Decide what and how much to buy

Start with how your household eats. Here's a simple way to estimate. Count the meals a week that include meat, then decide how many pounds one of those meals takes for your household. For example, four meat meals a week at one pound each is about 200 pounds in a year. Then divide by what your freezer can hold, and plan to restock rather than fill it all at once.

You can buy by the share (a quarter, half, or whole animal), or buy individual cuts and whole chickens from a farm or stand a few at a time. Individual cuts cost more per pound, but they need less room and less money up front.

Don't forget what else freezes well: berries, corn, greens, and bones for broth. Ask the farm what they recommend freezing, and when it's at its best.

3. How long it keeps

USDA says food kept at 0°F stays *safe* indefinitely. The times below are for *quality*: how long it tastes its best. After that, it's still safe, but it may be dry or off in flavor.

Meat	Best quality for (months)
Beef steaks, chops, and roasts	4 to 12
Ground beef, pork, lamb, or poultry	3 to 4
Pork chops and roasts	4 to 12
Lamb steaks, chops, and roasts	4 to 12
Bacon	1
Chicken, whole	12
Chicken, pieces	9

Eat the ground meat and bacon first, and save the roasts and steaks for later in the year.

Store and use

Keep it organized, keep it safe, and keep it tasty.

4. Pack, label, and organize

- **Ask how it comes packaged.** Many farms and butchers wrap or vacuum-seal meat for you. If you're packaging at home, wrap it tightly so little air touches the food. Air is what causes freezer burn.
- **Label everything** with the cut and the date. A marker and a roll of tape are enough.
- **Freeze in portions** your household will use at once, so you don't thaw more than you need.
- **Keep a list.** Tape a sheet to the freezer lid and cross things off. You'll find things faster, and you'll know what to eat next.
- **Rotate.** Put newer packages at the bottom or the back, and older ones on top.

5. Thaw safely

The safe ways to thaw meat are in the refrigerator, in cold water that you change as it warms, or in the microwave. Don't thaw meat on the counter. Plan ahead: a package thawing in the refrigerator can take a day or more, depending on its size.

6. Have a power-outage plan

USDA says a full freezer holds a safe temperature for about **48 hours** if the door stays closed, and a half-full freezer for about **24 hours**. So a full freezer rides out an outage better. Here's a plan:

- ☐ Keep the door closed.
- ☐ Keep a thermometer in the freezer so you can check it.
- ☐ Know a neighbor or friend with a working freezer, or a place to buy ice.
- ☐ Don't refreeze or eat meat that has been above 40°F for more than 2 hours.
- ☐ When in doubt, throw it out.

7. Find the farms

The Hudson Valley Almanac lists dozens of farms that sell meat shares and cuts directly to buyers. Open the map, search "meat shares" or "beef," and use the county filter or "Near me." Then call or visit the farm's website. Ask when they have beef, pork, lamb, or chicken ready, since many farms sell in batches through the year, and ask to be put on their list.

Before you buy, check:

- ☐ I know how much freezer space I have.
- ☐ I have a thermometer in the freezer.
- ☐ I know what my household will eat, and about how much.
- ☐ I asked the farm how the meat is packaged.
- ☐ I have a labeling plan and a power-outage plan.

Free from the Hudson Valley Almanac · hudsonvalleyalmanac.com · Devlin Foster
Storage guidance is from USDA and was checked October 11, 2026.