11-1929

Circular No. 81 - Beef Slaughtering, Cutting, and Curing

Harry H. Smith
Beef Slaughtering, Cutting, and Curing

HARRY H. SMITH

“This is the meat I would eat were I going to do battle with any mortal foe.”—William M. Thackeray
(Courtesy, Aberdeen-Angus Association)

Agricultural Experiment Station
Utah State Agricultural College
LOGAN, UTAH
Many farmers follow the practice of occasionally slaughtering a steer, a heifer, or a calf for home use. When this practice is followed the farmer is assured of getting meat of high quality. Experience has taught him that he is not always able to get meat at a local market which equals in quality that which he slaughters on his own farm. The butcher is not at fault as he usually handles the quality of meat his customers desire and will accept.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD MEAT

Anyone wishing to know more about meat should visit the cooler in one of the modern packing plants. Here he will find on the rail a large number of carcasses where usually most of the grades are represented. It should be noted that for trade convenience carcasses are classified and graded as follows:

Classes | Grades
--- | ---
Steers: | Prime, choice, good, medium, common cutter, low cutter
Heifers: | Prime, choice, good, medium, common cutter, low cutter
Cows: | Choice, good medium, common cutter, low cutter
Bulls and Stags: | Choice, good, medium, common cutter, low cutter
Veal and Calves: | Choice, good, medium, common cutter

Carcasses are classified according to sex and age. Grades within any one class are based on quality, shape of carcass, amount of fat, color of fat, and evenness of the distribution of fat.

As one walks through a packing house cooler he soon learns to recognize the differences which exist between the carcasses. Even though these carcasses may have all looked alike to him at first, on
closer examination he notes that there is a difference in size, in weight, in compactness, in length, in thickness of fleshing and of fat covering, and in the color of lean meat. In some the lean is a rich red; in others it is dark red. Some show a high degree of marbling. In some the meat is fine-grained; in others it is coarse. Some carcasses have much larger bones than have others and some carcasses are from younger animals than are others. These qualities are factors used in determining the value of a carcass.

There are some differences, such as tenderness, marbling, and color of lean meat, which cannot always be easily detected as the carcass hangs on the rail. However, these differences are important, and all have a decided bearing on the ultimate value of the product. In one way or another each characteristic plays an important role in making a favorable impression on the mind of the consumer when the roast is being carved at the dinner table.

**Tenderness.**—Tenderness is possibly of more importance in meat than any other one factor. It is affected principally by the following: (1) Age of animal when slaughtered, (2) marbling, (3) location of the cut in the carcass, and (4) length of time the carcass has hung in the cooler.

As the animal increases in age the connective tissue increases in amount and toughness. As the animal becomes older, the muscle fibers also become tougher. It is sometimes said that the only way to have tender meat is to buy it tender, and the best way to have it tender is to procure it from young animals.

In fairness to older animals, it should be said that there is a great deal of difference in the tenderness of meat from older animals. Meat from the carcass of one 4-year-old steer may be much more tender than meat from another, or it may even be more tender than from a yearling or a 2-year-old; and the meat from the older animal will certainly have more flavor. Because of the flavor, meat from older animals, if tender, is desired by the majority of people.

Marbling is the distribution of fat among the muscle fibers. It materially affects the tenderness of meat since the fatty acids have a weakening effect on the connective tissues which bind the muscle fibers together. A well-marbled piece of meat is usually tender.

The location of the piece in the carcass also has much to do with its tenderness. Some pieces of meat, such as the loin, are so located that they get little exercise and are always tender and, therefore, more easily cooked. Because of the tenderness of certain parts of the carcass, some cuts are more popular than others.

The interval from the time the animal is slaughtered until the meat reaches the retailer's shop ranges from three days to approximately two weeks, depending largely on the grade of carcasses. The better grades are held for a longer time in the packing and branch house coolers. Only carcasses which are well covered with fat can be held for any length of time in a cooler without breaking down. During

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1 "Types and Market Classes of Livestock" by Vaughan, p. 52. Published by R. G. Adams and Co., Columbus, Ohio. 1925.
the time meat is held in a cooler, changes occur which greatly affect its tenderness. These changes, spoken of as the "ripening process", have to do for the most part with the connective tissues, breaking them down and thus making the meat more tender. One reason for the better grades of meat being more tender is due to the fact that they have been held in the cooler for a longer time.

For meat to be judged "good" by the connoisseur it must possess characteristics other than tenderness. It must be juicy, moderate in amount of outside fat and of good flavor, as well as being attractive in appearance.

The juiciness of a piece of meat is determined largely by the amount of marbling, or internal fat, and the method of cooking. Most of us do not care for a great amount of outside fat on our beef; for meat to be well-marbled, however, there must be a certain amount of outside fat. Since fat is not placed in the muscle until there is a covering of fat on the outside of the body, a carcass from a thin animal is never marbled. It does not follow from this, however, that a carcass from a fat animal is always marbled. Some animals do not have the ability to put fat on the inside of the muscles. As a rule this is true of thin-muscled animals which are often of pronounced dairy conformation. An animal of thick, well-developed muscles is more apt to have meat which is well-marbled if it has a reasonable amount of outside fat which is easily distributed over the body.

The average consumer desires a maximum amount of lean meat and a minimum amount of outside fat. An excessive amount of outside fat is objectionable from the standpoint of both the consumer and the producer—from the standpoint of the consumer because it represents so much waste and from the standpoint of the producer because it represents an uneconomic practice. To make animals excessively fat is unprofitable. The happy medium is to give animals the degree of fatness which makes them attractive at the market and still profitable to the feeder.

**Flavor.**—Flavor is important in meat and is determined by the kind of animal, age of animal, degree of fatness, and proper ripening.

**Appearance.**—Cuts of meat are to be considered as most attractive in appearance which have bright, rich, red lean, and snow-white fat, and which are well-marbled, because these characteristics are associated with meat desirable from the standpoint of tenderness, flavor, etc.

**TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT**

It is not necessary to have an expensive or elaborate set of tools for farm slaughtering. The following tools fill all the requirements of farm slaughtering:

- **Knife**
- **Steel**
- **Saw**
- **Beef tree**
- **Set of pullies and ropes**
- **Hot water**
- **Clean cloths**

In buying slaughtering tools, quality (especially in regard to the knife)
must be considered, as it is impossible to do satisfactory work with a knife which does not hold an edge.

If but one knife is bought, it should be a 6-inch skinning knife. An ordinary butcher knife can be used for skinning, but it is not satisfactory. On the other hand, the skinning knife can be used satisfactorily for cutting up the carcass. If a second knife is bought it should be an 8-inch butcher knife. A steel, while not absolutely necessary, is useful in keeping a smooth, keen edge on the knife. If it is rough it has the same effect as a file, and a keen edge cannot be put on the knife. A good saw is almost indispensable for splitting the carcass and cutting it up. An ordinary 2-horse doubletree makes a good beef tree. When used as such the beef should be secured by the aid of clevises so that the carcass will not slip off when it is split. For hoisting the carcass, a hay fork rope and pulleys may be used. Hot water and cloths for washing the carcass should be provided.

**SELECTION OF THE ANIMAL**

In selecting an animal, possibly the first consideration is its health. No animal not in the best of health should ever be used for food. An animal that is fairly well-finished, thrifty, and gaining in weight is preferred. After the carcass is hung up, an inspection of both carcass and viscera should be made; if there is any cause for suspicion regarding its fitness for food a veterinarian should be consulted. The size of the animal selected will be determined largely by the amount of meat desired. Beeves 1 to 2 years old will dress from 50 to 55 per cent plus.

Young animals are usually selected because of their size and because of the fact that they are more tender; old animals are usually tough. Animals under 10 months are objected to because they frequently have a "veal" flavor.

**CARE OF ANIMAL BEFORE SLAUGHTERING**

If an animal is in an exhausted or over-heated condition, it should not be slaughtered, as the meat turns a fiery dark red and does not keep well. If an animal does become exhausted it is better to delay killing a day or so and give it a chance to become rested. The animal should be taken off feed the day before it is to be killed; it should, however, have access to plenty of water.

**SLAUGHTERING**

**Killing.**—There are two methods used in killing beeves. The method commonly used in packing houses is to hit them on the head with a light sledge hammer weighing 4 to 6 pounds. This is a satisfactory method if the animal is well secured. The animal is apt to dodge, and care must be taken to hit it in exactly the right place. If imaginary lines are drawn from each horn to the opposite eye, the point, where the lines cross and which is immediately over the brain as well as over the thinnest part of the skull, is the right place to hit. The common tendency is to hit too low. Just between the eyes is almost 3 inches too low.
A small caliber rifle is often used. This is a satisfactory method, provided one is a good shot. The rifle is especially handy when the animal is wild or if it is inconvenient or impossible to tie it and to hit it with a hammer. When the animal is shot the bleeding is not so profuse because death is instantaneous and the heart stops beating before all blood is pumped out. When the animal is stunned with a hammer it is not killed by the blow but dies from loss of blood; the heart continues to beat, thus pumping out the blood.

**STICKING**

As soon as the animal is down it should be stuck. A 6-inch skinning knife is recommended for this purpose, especially when the one who does the sticking is inexperienced. If the animal falls on its right side, the one doing the sticking stands with his back to the animal and pushes the front legs of the animal's back with his left foot and its head back with his right. The knife is started exactly at the point of the brisket. A cut is made toward the head about 12 inches long and parallel to the backbone. The knife is again inserted at the point of the breast bone and pushed toward the backbone. A cut is made on either the upper or lower side of the windpipe, severing the arteries just outside the chest cavity. Care must be taken not to cut too far under the breast bone as the blood will drain back into the chest cavity, often resulting in poor bleeding. Care should also be taken to see that the windpipe is not cut, as this allows the blood to enter the lungs.
By placing the foot in the flank and pulling up on the tail with a pumping motion a better bleed can be obtained, as considerable blood can be pumped out in this manner.

Fig. 3.—A better bleed is secured by placing the foot in the flank and pulling up on the tail with a pumping motion.
(Courtesy, Colo. Agr. Ext. Serv.)
SKINNING AND EVISCERATING

**Head.**—Skinning is the one job of slaughtering which is really difficult. If one has watched the operation in a packing plant it seems simple enough, but years have been spent by these men on the killing floor doing this one thing. Skinning, however, is not so difficult that the average man with a little care cannot do it reasonably satisfactorily.

The head is usually skinned out first. If the animal is placed on its right side, skinning is started at the left horn, splitting the skin down to the corner of the mouth and cutting from the left to the right horn. From the incision made when the animal was stuck, the skin is split to the center of the lower lip. The left side of the head is skinned, after which the face is skinned. By inserting a steel in one of the nostrils the head can be tilted back so that the under side of the head can be skinned. The head is cut off just back of the jaw bone at the puzzel or atlas joint. The gullet is tied off. Wherever skin is to be split, the knife should be held flat with the edge outward and a little upward to avoid cutting into the flesh. This is especially important when cutting over the thighs and belly.

**Shanking.**—The animal is rolled on its back and propped with a pritch. The shanks are skinned out. The skin is split on the back side of the front shanks to a point about 3 inches above the knees. The shank is skinned out and cut off at the lowest joint.

In skinning out the hind shanks, the first cut is made crosswise to the bone on the back of the shank, at a point midway between the hock and the dew claws. This allows the leg to flex. The cut is begun
at the dew claws and the hide is split up the back side of the leg, over the hock and to a point about 6 inches back of the cod or udder. The shanks and hocks are skinned out, removing the shanks at the lowest joint of the hock.

The skin should now be split from the tail along the mid-line to the cut made in sticking. In cutting over the brisket, the knife should be turned with the edge down and the cut made through the meat to the breast bone.

Next comes the most difficult part of the skinning operation. This is known as "sidding". The knife should have a smooth keen edge. The blade is kept flat against the hide, which should be kept stretched tight. The sides are skinned down almost to the backbone. However, the front shanks and shoulders are not skinned until the carcass is hung up. Leaving the skin on these parts protects it while the carcass is being hoisted.

While the carcass is still down, an opening is made in the ab­dominal cavity just back of the breast bone. The abdominal cavity is opened to the pelvic arch. The knife is held with point up, the hand inside the abdomen. The caul fat, which is a sheet of fat surrounding the intestines, is removed; the gullet and windpipe are loosened.

Cutting Pelvic and Breast Bones.—The intestines are pulled out from in front of the pelvic bone which is sawed through. If the animal is a young one, not more than 2 years old, the bone can be split with a butcher knife, provided the knife is set in the center of the bone where it is joined by a cartilage. However, for the inexperienced, cutting through with the saw will be more satisfactory.

In cutting through the breast bone, one should stand just back of the animal's shoulder and face toward its head. With a saw the breast bone is sawed through. The animal is now ready for hoisting.

Hoisting.—The beef tree or spreader is inserted by making an incision between the large tendon and the bone just above the hock. The carcass is now ready to hoist. The carcass is raised so that the tail is about as high as the skinner's waist. The skin of the tail is split on the under side. The tail is cut off at a joint close to the base and pulled out of the hide. Thighs and hind quarters are now skinned out. The carcass is hoisted a foot or two higher, the rectum is loosened, and the intestines are pulled out. The paunch is now pulled down to loosen it. The gullet is cut off where it enters the diaphragm. The liver is loosened and the gall bladder carefully removed. The diaphragm is cut where it joins the muscle on the back, leaving the muscle which is known as the "skirt". The heart, lungs, and gullet are next removed and the skinning completed. If the hide is to be kept for any length of time it should be salted as soon as the animal heat has left it.

Washing and Cooling.—As soon as the carcass is split down the back the carcass should be wiped off with a rag wrung out of hot water. The inside of the carcass should also be wiped. The carcass
should now be left to cool for at least 24 hours, or, even better, for 48 hours. If the temperature is between 30° and 40° F. the carcass will then be cooled and thus be ready for cutting. The carcass should be allowed to freeze unless it is to be kept frozen, for the purpose of keeping the meat for some time. Freezing, however, does make the meat more tender. Meat which has been frozen begins to break down very quickly after it is thawed out.

**CUTTING**

**Quartering.**—The beef is quartered between the twelfth and thirteenth ribs. This leaves one rib on the hind quarter. The knife is inserted between these ribs and cut out to within 6 inches of the outer edge of the flank. This 6-inch strip will hold the fore quarter while the backbone is being sawed through. The knife is turned and a cut made to the backbone which is sawed through. The flank is then completely cut. Quartered in this manner, the hind quarters represent about 48 per cent of the carcass weight and the front quarters about 52 per cent.

**Cutting the Front Quarter.**—The front quarter is placed on the table with the outside up. The first cut is made across the ribs. Beginning at “e” (Fig. 5), on the back part of the front quarter where it is the thinnest, a cut is made straight across the ribs and fore shank to where the front shank joins the body. The next piece to be taken off marked No. 1, including the first seven ribs, is known as the prime ribs and is the best roast in the front quarter. It may be roasted as a standing rib roast or be boned out and rolled, making a rolled rib roast.

![Diagram of Beef Quartering](Fig. 5.—Front quarter cuts:
1.—Seven prime ribs
2.—Plate (boiling meat)
3.—Brisket (boiling meat)
4.—Shank (boiling and soup meat)
4-7.—Shoulder rib roast
8.—Pot roast
9-10.—Cross-arm roast
11-12.—Neck (boiling meat)

The part which is left of the front quarter is known as the shoulder or chuck. One or two more roasts (Nos. 4 and 5, Fig. 5), may be taken off; or, if preferred, some steaks may be cut. The next cut is to take off some cross-arm cuts sometimes called cross-rib roasts (Nos. 9 and 10, Fig. 5). About this time the large joint at the lower end of the shoulder blade will be reached; this, of course, depends on the thickness of the roasts cut. This joint should be removed and the remaining piece cut into suitable sized roasts or boils. Pieces Nos. 11 and 12 (Fig. 5) are neck and should be used for hamburger or boiling meat.
Fig. 6.—Separating the plate, brisket, and shank from the shoulder and prime ribs.  
(Courtesy, Colo. Agr. Ext. Serv.)

Instead of cutting pieces Nos. 9 and 10 (Fig. 5) for roasts, they may be cut into cross-arm steaks, somewhat resembling round steaks.

Fig. 7.—Separating the seven prime ribs from the chuck.
although they are tougher. The plate, brisket, and shank should all be used for boiling or soup meat. If corned beef is desired the brisket should be utilized for this purpose. It cures better because of the higher percentage of fat which it usually carries.

Cutting the Hind Quarters.—Compared with the front, the hind quarter is more easily cut. The quarter is laid on the block with the inside up. The first cut is taken off the flank. Starting in the region of the cod a cut is made on a straight line to the front end of the loin to a point about 4 or 5 inches from the tip end of the rib left in the hind quarter (line “a” to “b”, Fig. 8). This will remove most of the thin meat from the loin.

The hind quarter is now turned with the inside down. The next cut is taken off the loin which is almost perpendicular to the backbone. This cut (“e to “f”, Fig. 8) is made by cutting about 3 to 4 inches in front of the stif joint through the large ball and socket joint which can be found by placing the hand about half way between the stif joint and the backbone. By taking hold of the shank with the other hand and working it up and down the joint can be found. The loin is sometimes divided into two pieces (Nos. 4 and 5, Fig. 8) by cutting along line “c” to “d”, which passes just in front of the hip bone. Piece No. 4 is called the loin end. It is from this piece that the sirloin steaks are obtained. Piece No. 5 (Fig. 8) is called short loin and contains the porterhouse or T-bone and club steaks. The club steaks are the first four or five steaks which come from the front of the loin. Club steaks are known by various names such as Delmonicos, short cuts, Yales, etc. They are very choice steaks and are considered second only to the porterhouse or T-bone which includes all of those steaks back to the hip bone that have the tenderloin muscles in them.

The rump roast is removed by cutting just back of the pelvic bone and parallel to it. The rump makes one of the best flavored roasts in the entire carcass; however, it contains a high percentage of fat.

In cutting off the round steaks the round is laid with the inside of the leg up; the steaks are cut off parallel with the cut made in taking off the rump roast. Round steaks are cut off up to and including the stif joint. The triangular piece remaining (No. 7, Fig. 8), is known by such names as the wedge, Pike’s peak, the heel of the round,
etc. It is generally too tough for roasting but makes an excellent boiling piece.

METHODS OF KEEPING OR PRESERVING BEEF

On most farms beef is not cured to the same extent as is pork. Many tons of beef, however, are cured by packers each year and consumed by the American public. Preserving beef is not a difficult process and is usually done by one of three common methods: (1) Corning, (2) drying, and (3) freezing.

Corning.—The brisket and plate are most often used for corning, though any part of the carcass may be used. Because the brisket and plate contain a higher percentage of fat than do other parts of the carcass, the fat makes them more suitable for curing. The meat is cut into pieces of 4 or 5 pounds each. The vessel in which the curing is to be done should be thoroughly washed and scalded. For each 100 pounds of meat, the following brine is prepared:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>4 lbs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saltpeter</td>
<td>4 oz.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baking soda</td>
<td>2 oz.</td>
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This mixture is dissolved in 4 gallons of boiling water and thoroughly cooled. Ten pounds of salt are weighed out and a little is sprinkled in the bottom of the container. Each piece of meat is rubbed with salt as it is put down, and a little salt is sprinkled over each layer. A generous layer of salt is placed on the top layer of meat. The meat
stands for 24 hours, after which the cool brine is poured on. The meat is weighted down with a clean board and is kept in a cool place.

While the meat may be used in about two weeks it will not be thoroughly cured for at least 30 days. The meat may be left in the brine until needed; however, if left in the brine longer than a month it becomes too salty for use and must be parboiled. For anyone preferring a smoked flavor, the meat may be taken out at the end of 30 days, hung in the smoke house, and given a light smoke.

If the meat is kept in the brine during the summer, it must be closely watched because of its tendency to spoil. If any ropiness is noted in the brine the meat must be taken out and washed. It is better to make fresh brine; however, if the old brine is used, it must be boiled, skimmed, and strained. The vessel in which the meat is to be packed must be thoroughly washed and scalded.

**Drying Beef.**—For making dried beef the round is generally used, although any thick, lean piece may be utilized. Where the round is used it is usually divided into three pieces, called the knuckle (coming from the front of the legs) and the "inside" and the "outside". When the three pieces are sold together, they are known as a "set" of dried beef.

The meat is cured in the brine in the same manner as described under corning beef. About three days to the pound is allowed for each piece. After the meat has cured it should be taken out and hung in a dry, warm place for 36 hours. As a strong smoke flavor is desired, it should then be smoked from 70 to 80 hours.

**Freezing.**—On the farms of the middle states the practice of keeping beef by freezing could be utilized to a much greater extent than it has been in the past. Frozen meat does not undergo any change. Meat may be kept for long periods during the winter months, even with occasional warm days, if it is kept hanging on the north side of buildings. Another method which has proved effective is to cut the meat in small pieces, leaving them out over night where they can freeze; they are then packed down in snow in a nail keg or in a similar container which can be kept on the north side of a building. The meat is taken out as needed. Meat frozen in a large piece is difficult to cut into suitable sizes; however, when cut into smaller pieces before freezing it will not only be more convenient to use but will also be less wasteful.

**BEEF RINGS**

In certain sections of the country beef rings have been found to be popular. Members of beef rings have found that meat obtained from this source has cost them from 5 to 15 cents a pound less than if it had been purchased locally and generally it was of better quality. Beef rings are more popular than either hog or sheep rings, although hog and sheep rings can be handled in the same manner.

A beef ring is a cooperative concern organized for the purpose of supplying fresh meat to its members during the summer months in
amounts which can be utilized before spoiling. Any number may compose a ring. It will be more simple, however, if the number composing a beef ring is four or a multiple of four. The number of members in a beef ring depends on the size of its respective families and on the size of the animals to be killed. If 1000-pound animals are to be killed and they are good enough to have an average dressing percentage of 60, there would be 600 pounds of meat to be distributed at a time. If there are eight families in the ring, this means that each family receives 75 pounds of meat which would probably be too much when no refrigeration is available. If there are 16 families in the ring, each family would receive 37.5 pounds, which for most families would probably be a more suitable amount. The most popular sized rings are composed of 16, 20, or 24 families.

Table 1.—Method of cutting meat for a 24-member beef ring

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nos.</th>
<th>Boils</th>
<th>Roasts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1—12</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>2—14</td>
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<td>12—24</td>
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Fig. 10.—Method of cutting for a 24-share beef ring.

A beef ring should be organized in a business-like way with its own constitution and by-laws. Before the organization begins to function, there are several things which must be decided: (1) The number of members, (2) provision for slaughtering, (3) provision for some-

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2Information regarding organization of a beef ring will be furnished on request by the Department of Animal Husbandry, U.S.A.C.
one, usually one of the members, to do the slaughtering, (4) the amount to be paid for slaughtering, cutting, etc., (5) the manner of cutting up the carcass and deciding just what will constitute a share\(^3\), (7) the price members will pay, (8) the time at which animals are to be delivered, and (9) the time at which meat is to be ready for delivery.

It should be made clear from the start that only those who are in sympathy with a cooperative movement should become members. The animals are usually furnished by each member in turn, or they may be purchased each week by the club. A committee of the members should “pass” on each animal before it is slaughtered. If animals are presented which are too young, too old, or too thin they can be refused. An accurate account of the meat obtained by each member each week is kept. Regardless of how accurate the butcher may be, it is impossible to cut each share so that each one gets exactly the same to an ounce. At the end of the season a meeting is held and accounts balanced. If more meat has been secured by any one member than the value of the animal supplied, the account is settled with the other members of the beef ring club. On the other hand, if any member has supplied an animal of greater value than the meat which he has obtained he is paid the difference. Table 1 and Figure 10 indicate how the shares are distributed in a 24-member beef ring. This method gives to each member each time a roast and a boil. The organization of a beef ring will prove beneficial to families in many communities. In most sections, such clubs are the best source of summer meat for the farm. They furnish a high quality of beef, as well as a change from cured pork or other meats. There is a place for a beef ring in many communities of Utah.

\(A\) chart should be made showing just how and where each share will be cut.

**Note:** The Publications Division of the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station also has available by the same author the following:

Circular 80—Domestic Slaughtering, Cutting, and Curing of Pork.
Circular 82—Lamb Slaughtering and Cutting.