



Yields and Loss: How much meat to expect from a lamb

Authored by Davida Rimm-Kaufman, Mobile Processing Unit Coordinator, Virginia State University, Cooperative Extension; Reviewed by Dr. Dahlia O'Brien, Small Ruminant Specialist, Virginia State University, Cooperative Extension

Introduction

Increased interest in local meats has led to an influx of direct marketing, or selling directly to consumers.

Many small-scale livestock producers will finish livestock on-farm, send them to a USDA inspected slaughterhouse, and sell the meat under a farm label. This process creates opportunities for small farms to build a customer base and sell at a higher price point, as well as strengthen local economies. When sending a live lamb to a slaughterhouse, it is imperative to understand how much meat to expect back. Each step of slaughter leads to weight loss, meaning the amount of meat leaving the facility will look quite different than the weight of the animal that entered. Understanding principles of yield and loss is essential for producers direct marketing meat.

Definitions

The following definitions are important terms to understand when direct marketing lambs.

Live (empty) weight

The weight of the live animal, after food/ water has been withheld for ~24 hours. Empty weight can be 2-6 lbs. less than a “full weight,” because gut/digestive organs are empty.

Hot carcass weight (HCW)

The weight of the carcass after head, hooves, hide and internal organs are removed. Bones, muscle and fat remain. Some facilities may also use the term “hanging weight.” The ratio of live to hot carcass weights is known as a dressing percentage. Dressing percentage varies depending on breed, age, health,

and how recently the animal has eaten. The following diagram illustrates a lamb with a dressing percentage of 50%.

Cold carcass weight (CCW)

After the slaughter process, the carcass is chilled. During chilling, water is lost through evaporation. Water evaporation can account for 1%-4% HCW, per day. In the diagram, the carcass was chilled for 24 hours, losing 1 lb. Weight loss through evaporation is important to keep in mind when aging carcasses, or leaving them in a cooler for extended periods to increase flavor and tenderness.

Closely trimmed boneless retail cuts

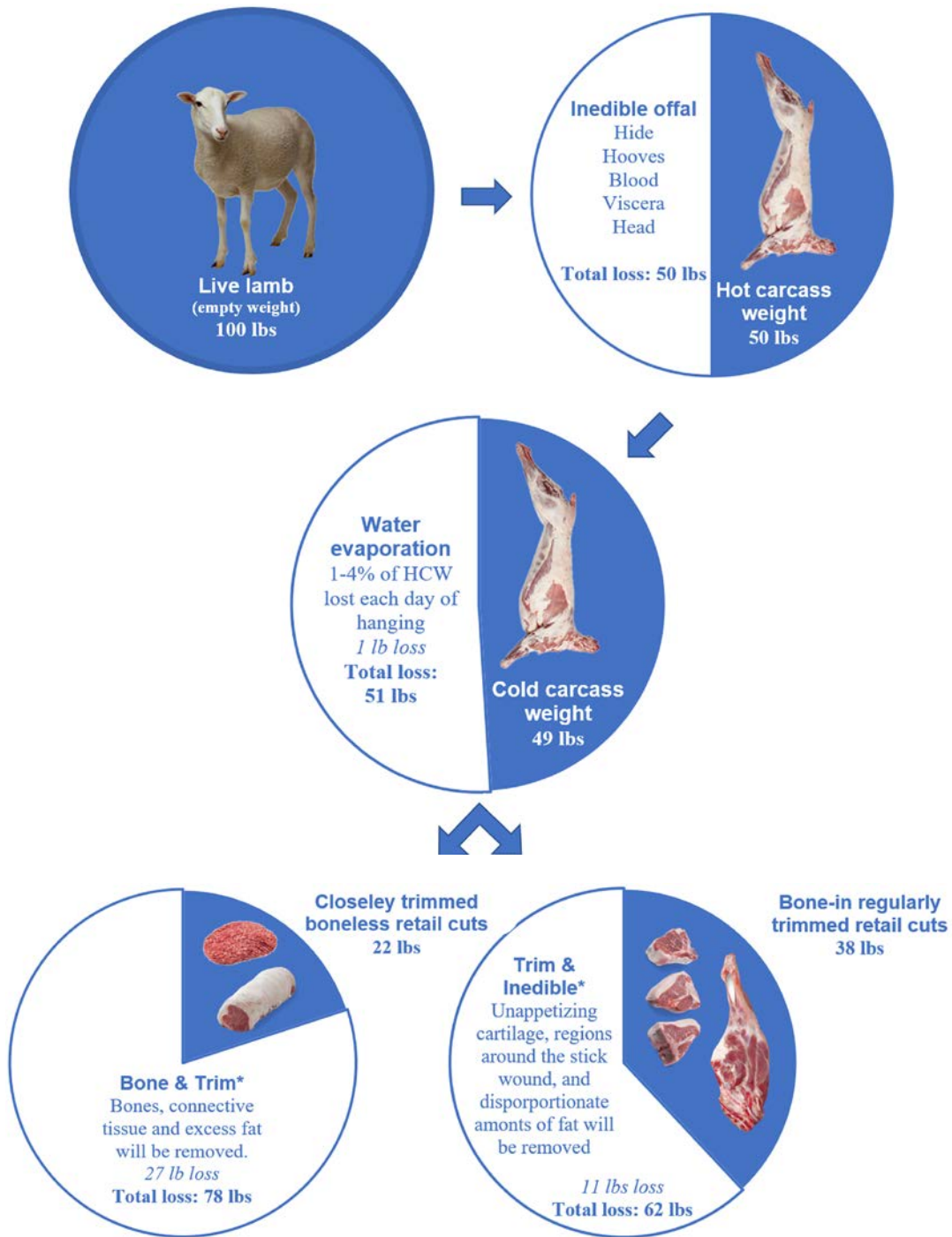
If opting for boneless, closely trimmed cuts, most of the bone and external fat will be discarded. Turning a primal into ground product will have similar yields because bones must be removed prior to grinding.

Bone-in regularly trimmed cuts

This option for cutting results in less yield loss. Many factors contribute to a consumer’s preference for bone-in or boneless cuts, so understanding your market is imperative.

References

Ihde, Carolyn, Amanda L. Cauffman, Ashley A. Olsen, and William Halfman. “How Much Meat Should a Lamb Yield?” *Livestock*, n.d. <https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/articles/how-much-meat-should-a-lamb-yield/>.



* Amounts of trim loss vary between meat cutters and processing facilities

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