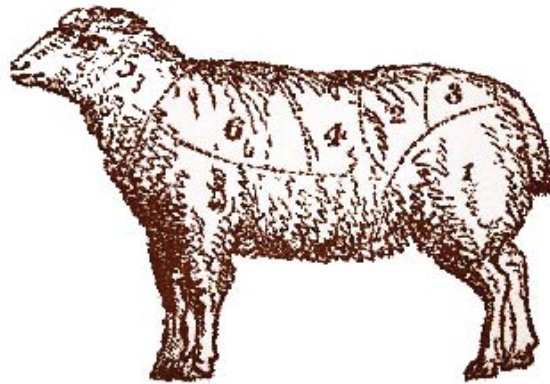


Butcher's Series #2: Lamb

FRESH FORK MARKET



BUTCHER'S SERIES



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I once spent a summer in Australian and New Zealand. The first 6 weeks were spent in Swan Hill, Australia, about an hour north of Melbourne. It was winter there and I attended school occasionally with my host family and had the good fortune of exploring most of south-eastern Australia.

Everywhere I went I heard jokes about the “Kiwis.” That’s the slang term for New Zealanders. Most of the jokes revolved around sheep, such as:

‘A man sees another gentleman walking down the street with one sheep under each arm. He asks the stranger, “You sheering?” The stranger replies aggressively, “No, they’re both mine!”’

Now let your mind wonder into the gutter and apply an Aussie accent. OK, now you are giggling.

New Zealander’s are known for their sheep and the Aussies often tell dirty jokes about Kiwi’s and their sheep. In New Zealand, sheep outnumber people 10 to one, and at one point it was as high as 40 to one. There are a lot of sheep in New Zealand. In fact, when I was there the family I stayed with had a farm with sheep. That was my first exposure to livestock as I watched my host family assist the ewes during the lambing period.

Trevor

Lamb in America. An Introduction

Once upon a time, many folks butchered their own meat. As the nature of agriculture and food buying changed, so did our habits. We went from buying live animals, to buying cuts from a local butcher that we trusted. Next we moved on to buying from a store with an in-house butcher. Today, most people buy their meat from a grocery store chain.

This streamlined approach has kept meat prices artificially low, and made the entire meat industry much more homogenous. Today’s commercial meat industry does not leave room for thoughtfully raised animals that are slaughtered humanely. It leaves out heritage breeds which are often more flavorful than conventionally raised meats. There is little room in this modernized environment for animals that are not already popular.

One of these animals is lamb. Lamb production peaked in the 40's and 50's (in US and abroad). At its peak there were 55 million heads of lamb in the US. In recent years lamb has fallen out of popularity. This means it is rarely available at the local chain grocery, contributing to its waning popularity with the home cook. And furthermore, today most lamb is imported from Australian and New Zealand. There, they grow sheep for wool as well, so the breeds produced are not the best eating.

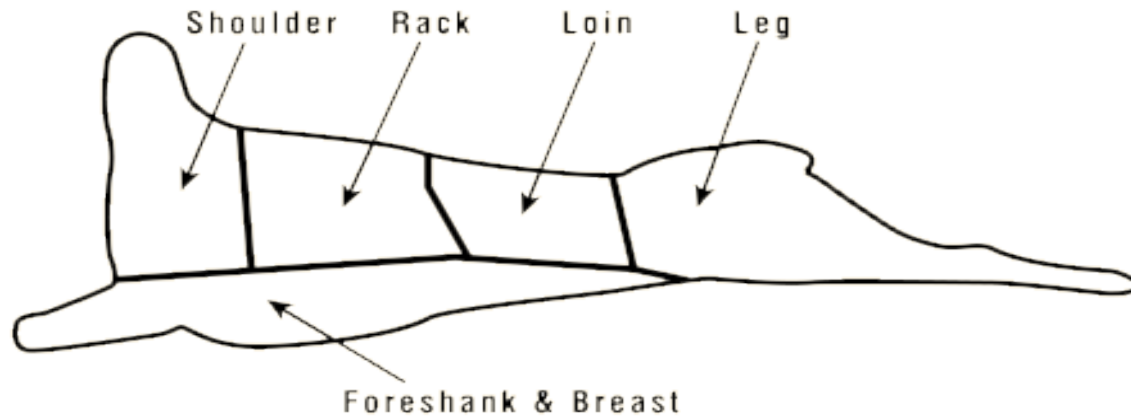
For our farmers, they are raising a "hair sheep," called Katahdin. This sheep is a breed with hair instead of wool. The hair does not need sheering and they tend to be hardier and better eating sheep. At first you may question why wouldn't you want the wool. The answer is simple - price. Farmers are paid \$0.50 to \$1.00 per sheep for the wool. It costs \$3 per sheep to have them sheered.

Eating Lamb: By Parker Bosley

Properly prepared lamb can be succulent and delicious. It is a lean, nutrient dense protein source. Sheep are also a good source of dairy products. Besides food applications, lamb provides wool, lanolin, and can be a part of a complete landscaping maintenance plan. The advantages of raising sheep are multi-faceted, and Fresh Fork Market is happy to sell lamb as part of its program. Our thanks go out Parker Bosley and Adam Lambert for taking on this demonstration and putting together a selection of tasty dishes that encourage the consumption of lamb, both at home and when dining out.

Lamb is a year round-treat. It goes well with winter root vegetables as well as spring and early summer vegetables such as peas, green beans and braising greens. Potatoes and dried heirloom beans are perfect with any preparation of lamb.

Lamb has a rich flavor. There is a concentration of flavor in the meat. One reason for this is the fact that there is very little fat within the muscle; the meat is not marbled as it is with beef. A typical lamb coming to market is between five and eight months old. Most of the fat is what we call cover fat. It is removed in the process of butchering and fabrication of various cuts. Likewise, much of this cover fat "melts" in the cooking process.



Lamb Cuts

Hind Quarter (leg)

A whole leg of lamb includes the leg as well as the sirloin. When the sirloin is separated from the leg we refer to the leg as a short leg. A leg with the bone in, shank removed is referred to as an American cut leg of lamb. A leg of lamb with the sirloin removed and shank on is considered a French cut leg of lamb.

The Short Leg (leg with no sirloin):

The short leg has multiple preparations. Among them are: bone in roast, butterflied leg for grilling, and separated into three major parts or muscles- bottom round, top round and eye of round.

The Sirloin

The sirloin is most often used as a roast or cut into steaks or kebobs.

Loin

The loin refers to the portion between the hip and the shoulder. It is sometimes called the middle meat. This includes the rack of lamb which is near the shoulder and the saddle (often the piece that is marketed as the loin) which is near the hip. Both can be used for chops. These cuts are best when grilled or sautéed. The ribs are also part of the middle meat. Often overlooked, the ribs can be grilled or braised. The skirt steak is also part of the middle meat.

Shoulder

The shoulder, also called the forequarter, is generally cut into boned rolled roast, shoulder chops, flat iron steak, ground meat or the French sausage known as *Merguez*.

Bones

Leftover lamb bones, especially neck bones, can be used for making stock. Lamb provides an excellent meat stock for soups—especially winter root vegetables soups.

Parker Select

Parker Bosley was the founder and co-owner of Parker's New American Bistro in Cleveland before retiring at the end of 2006. He worked as a chef and local foods advocate for more than 20 years. He now works full time with small scale farms throughout Ohio. He is a consultant to people interested in sustainable food and farming.

One of Parker's contributions to Fresh Fork Market has been the development of our new product line, Parker Select. This product line is designed with the home gourmet in mind. It will include hard-to-find heritage breeds of animals and special cuts of meat. These animals are being specially raised for us and are prized by chefs around the globe for their unique properties. They are all raised using traditional techniques.

These products will come with recipes and preparation techniques to make home preparation accessible. Some will come bundled with produce and other goods. The goal is to offer you a no-fuss gourmet meal at home, for yourself or for that special dinner party.

Our first items in the Parker Select product line will be lamb cuts. These will include Frenched Rack of Lamb and specially cut roasts. These cuts come from grass grazed lambs of the Katahdin breed. Katahdin lambs are prized for their relatively lean meat and mild flavor.

Recipes

Leg of Lamb (boned, rolled and tied)

Heat the oven to 450 degrees.

Chop onions, carrots and celery to cover the bottom of the roasting pan or you may choose to use a rack placed in the roasting pan.

Lay the boned leg of lamb skin side down. Season with finely minced garlic and rosemary, according to your taste, salt and pepper. Reshape the leg and tie it in several places.

Place the lamb, seam side down in the roasting pan. Set the pan in the lower half of the oven (450 degrees). Roast for 20 minutes and then lower the heat to 350. Continue roasting for about 40 minutes. Total roasting time for a boned leg of lamb will be about one hour. Meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the leg should read 125-130 for medium rare.

Let the roasted lamb rest on the cutting board for about 15 minutes before carving.

Lamb Shoulder with Heirloom Beans

Because it would be difficult to make this dish other than in a large quantity it will take some planning. You will need at least two days, but three or four would be better. The final product can be kept in the refrigerator for several days or frozen in manageable portions.

5-6 cups beans

1 small carrot, peeled and left whole

1 small onion, halved and peeled

½ stalk celery, cut into 3 pieces

1 tsp dried thyme

1 bay leaf

Prepare the beans. Use beans from a local source. Commercial beans are often heat dried and might have been in storage for months or even a couple of years. First, spread

the beans out on a tray. Shake the tray and look for broken pieces, shells or “foreign” products. Discard these. Wash the beans in cold running water.

Place the beans in a heavy bottom pan and cover with water. Bring to the boil. Strain the beans and plunge them into cold water. Stir until the beans have lost all their heat. Rinse again.

Clean the heavy bottom pan. Put the beans back into the pan and add water to a level of 2-3 inches above the beans. Bring to the boil and skim for 2-3 minutes. Lower the heat to medium or medium low. The water should bubble just a little. Add the vegetables, bay leaf and thyme. Depending on the type of beans you are using, the cooking time will vary—a couple of hours or 4-5 hours. The only way to know that the beans are cooked is to test by tasting.

Note: Salt should not be added until the beans are thoroughly cooked. I've found this to be very good advice.

When the beans are soft set them aside to cool in their cooking water. Discard the carrot, celery, onion and bay leaf. Refrigerate the beans in their cooking liquid.

The Lamb Shoulder: Heat the oven to 450 degrees

1 whole lamb shoulder, bone in

8 garlic cloves, peeled

1 each, carrot, onion and celery stalk

3 cups of red wine, Zinfandel is good

1 cup rich stock--lamb, beef or chicken

2 tsp dried rosemary (boiled for 2 minutes, drained and minced)

1 tsp dried thyme

Prepare the wine. Heat the wine and ignite it. Let it flame to burn off the alcohol. Continue to boil until it is reduced by about 1/3.

Use a roasting pan that can be moved to the top of the stove when finishing the dish. Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Use the point of a sharp knife to pierce the fat cover of the lamb and insert the garlic cloves at various places.

Peel and chop the onion and carrot and celery and use these to cover the bottom of the roasting pan. Add the reduced wine and the stock with the rosemary and thyme. Place the lamb shoulder, studded with the garlic, on the vegetables. Roast the lamb uncovered for 20 minutes at 450 degrees.

Reduce the temperature to 250. Cover the lamb with the top of the roasting pan or with foil. Tuck the edges of the foil around the roasting pan. Check from time to time to make sure the liquid does not evaporate. Add water if necessary.

Roast the lamb until it nearly falls from the bone. This may take 4-5 hours. *Roast the lamb the day before you plan to serve this dish.*

Cool the lamb and remove it from the roasting pan. Wrap the lamb in plastic to prevent the edges from drying. Refrigerate. Strain the cooking liquid from the roasting pan and refrigerate it.

The beans are ready, the lamb is cooked and the cooking juices are refrigerated. These three components can remain in the refrigerator for two or three days.

Final preparation of the dish:

Remove the fat from the top of the liquid in which the lamb was cooked. Combine this cooking liquid with the beans. Cook the beans for about 45 minutes more with this lamb stock. Season with salt and pepper.

Remove the lamb from the bones. You should be able to remove nearly all the fat from the meat. Pull the lamb apart and/or cut it into large piece. Remove all the fat. Add the lamb to the beans.

Continue cooking the beans with the lamb. Don't boil.

Serve the beans in shallow soup bowls. Lay piece of lamb on the beans. Spoon some of the cooking liquid over the lamb. Garnish with minced flat leaf parsley.

Rack of Lamb

This is the prime cut and the most coveted. It is often the entree of choice for special dinners. A rack of lamb from a well raised carcass, properly prepared, makes dinner a special occasion. It is best when all fat has been removed to expose the lean flavorful meat.

A seven or eight bone rack is perfect for two people.

Ideally, the layers of fat and very thin layers of meat covering the loin should be removed. If not removed before grilling or sautéing, the diner will have to struggle with knife and fork to remove it. (Remember that all trimmings can be used in the stock pot where you can extract both flavor and nutrition.)

Heat a small amount of olive oil in the sauté pan set over high heat. Place the rack of lamb meat side down and bone side up. After about five minutes, remove the lamb rack from the sauté pan. Place it on an oven proof plate and finish cooking it in a 350 degree oven.

Use your finger to determine when the rack is cooked to your preferred “doneness.” For rare, the meat will remain soft and spongy to the touch—little or no resistance. For medium rare there will be a slight bit of firmness. When the meat is firm to the touch it is well done and in the case of lamb over-cooked.

While the lamb is in the oven, pour off the cooking oil from the saute pan and deglaze with about a half cup of red wine. Boil the wine until it has nearly evaporated. Add a cup of lamb stock and reduce by half. This will make a “sauce” that doesn’t compete with the wonderful flavor of the lamb. It only adds to the eating experience.

If you prefer, grilling the lamb rack will work very well. This is the perfect preparation with spring and early summer vegetables come to market.

The same process for making the rack of lamb can be used for chops or a boneless loin.

Loin Lamb Chops

(the T-bone which includes a portion of the loin and a portion of the tenderloin) Another option is to remove the loin and the tenderloin from the bone. This makes them perfect for grilling or a quick sauté.

Season the rack or individual chops or the whole loin with salt and pepper. Although many complex preparations, marinades, crusts and sauces are suggested, a rack of lamb is best when only its rich taste and texture are offered.

Making Lamb Stock

Lamb stock requires a little more attention than beef or chicken stock. Because of the rich flavor, the unique flavor, of lamb I suggest that you do not brown the bones before making the stock. Burning the edges of the meat or bones can impart an unpleasant taste in the stock. Likewise, lamb fat can add to much flavor.

Place the bones and trim meat in a large stock pot. Bones should take up half the volume of the pot. Cover the bones with cold water. The water level should be 3 or 4 inches above the bones. Bring the water to a rolling boil. Skim for about five minutes. Lower the heat to medium or low. Add a large onion and a large carrot that have been peeled and chopped. Add a chopped stalk of celery. Add a bay leaf a tablespoon of dried thyme.

Adjust the heat so that the stock bubbles just a little. Do not boil. Cook for 4 or 5 hours. Add water from time to time to keep the level a couple of inches above the bones and vegetables. Let the stock cool and then strain through a damp cloth. Refrigerate overnight. Remove all the fat that has come to the top.

Return the stock to a pot and simmer to reduce it by 1/3. You can freeze the stock in small portion for use in sauces and soups.

Lamb Shanks

Lamb shanks are worth the effort.

2 shanks

1 each, medium onion and carrot peeled and chopped

1 TBS each of dried rosemary and thyme

2 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled

1 cup red wine

1 cup of lamb stock

salt and pepper

2-3 TBS olive oil

Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the lamb shanks in a baking pan such as an enameled gratin pan. Use a pan that can be moved to the stove top for finishing the dish. The shanks should nearly touch the sides. Do not use a large baking dish. Cover the bottom of the baking pan with a thin layer of olive oil. Lay the lamb shanks in the pan. Season the shanks with salt and pepper. Cover with the onion and carrot, the herbs and the garlic. Pour the wine and stock over the shanks.

Roast in the oven at 400 for 20 minutes. Lower the heat to 250 and continue roasted until the meat is nearly falling off the bones. This could take 2-3 hours depending on the size of the shanks. You may have to add water from time to time to maintain about an inch of water in the baking pan.

Remove the dish from the oven and let it cool. Take the shanks from the pan and wrap them in plastic and refrigerate. Strain the cooking liquid and refrigerate. All of this work can be done 1 or 2 days before you want to serve this dish.

To finish, remove the fat from the top of the stock or cooking liquid. Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the shanks in a baking dish and pour the stock over them. Place in the oven for about 45 minutes until the meat is reheated completely.

Taste and add salt and pepper to your taste. Serve with parsnip puree, braised carrots and celery or mashed potatoes.

Other Cuts of Lamb

Don't overlook those less popular cuts of lamb; the classic lamb shank, the neck bones, the ribs and the skirt steak. These cuts require more time and a little more work—a good weekend project. The results are worth the investment.

The **ribs** can be braised and set aside for later use. Braised ribs seasoned with salt and pepper can be finished on the grill or in a very hot oven. Serve with a “pesto” of fresh rosemary and garlic and just a bit of olive oil.

The lamb **skirt steak**, cut in pieces, makes a perfect stir-fry. Whole skirt steak marinated with olive oil, lemon and garlic cook in minutes on the grill.

Neck bones are challenging. Braise the neck bones with chopped onion, carrot and celery and a little lamb stock and red wine. The work begins when the neck bones are cool enough to handle. Using a fork, lift the pieces of meat from the bones and combine it with the strained cooking juices. Serve as a soup or a gravy for turnip mashed potatoes—mashed potatoes made from 2/3 potatoes and 1/3 turnips.