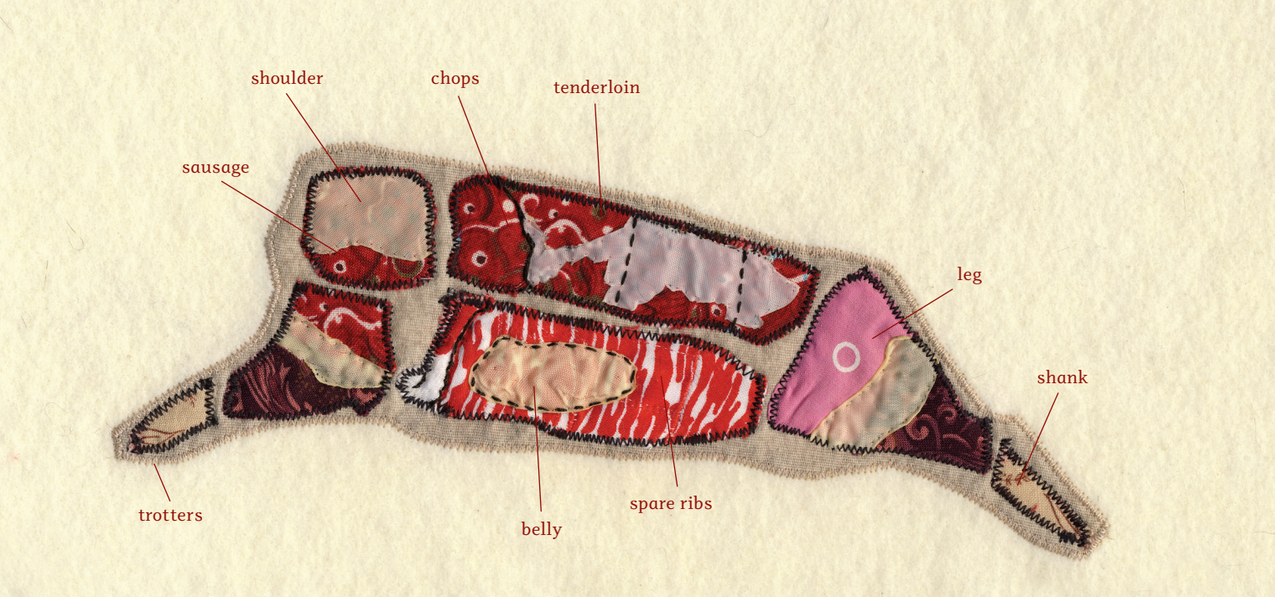


# Share and Share Alike

## *Etiquette cues to divvy a pig*

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**I RAN THE SECOND** meat Community Supported Agriculture project in the country. I am not a rancher, a butcher, or in the possession a of cold storage facility. (For the record, if you are going to run a meat CSA you should place yourself in one of the above categories or be fairly warned.) I learned it the hard way, but at least I can promise that with a little gumption and some guidance, you don't need a middleman to get your meat.

If you have a sturdy checkbook and a chest freezer, a big family, or a particularly carnivorous diet, you can ignore this primer and order a whole pig from a local farmer who gets his or her animals slaughtered and processed for direct purchase. You'll get loin roasts, hams, fatty shoulders, sausage, sides of bacon, meaty bones. Get the cuts, open a cookbook, and be done with it. If you were a member of my CSA, though, you wanted 10 pounds, 15 pounds. You wanted it in your tiny freezer. You wanted it to cost less than $7 a pound. If that describes you, listen up, because here's what you do: Think poetically for a moment.

The animal is a blank slate, the animal is a canvas, the animal is an uncut puzzle. There's no one right way to butcher an animal. There are countless ways, and each way attends to different needs. In fat times, animals are cut up according to one principle: the luxury of meat, the Ferraris of cuts, the canary diamonds, the oysters and pearls. As these are not fat times, it is seemly to employ another imperative: parity.

This is a guide for rationing out a pig among a group of people with a mind toward parity. It is a fairly simple blueprint to help you think in these lean terms and then communicate clearly with a rancher, a butcher (if the rancher does not handle butchery instructions himself), and whoever will share the cost and the meat with you. It is based on the following basic principles, and they are just as difficult and rewarding to apply here as anywhere else.

1. PATIENCE: Buying a whole animal is doable, even if you don't have space to store more than 10 pounds. But you must patiently research local ranches and patiently await calls back from ranchers once you have. You can do it all impatiently, too, but that cuts down on the benefits.

2. COMPROMISE: Since you have to share the meat among a crowd (12 is a good number), you have to prioritize getting a deal over a habit for getting your way — trying to get a-crown-roast-and-only-a-crown-roast when you are sharing a pig will drop you solidly in the land of someone with whom no one wants to share again.

3. PRACTICALITY: Begin to think of cuts of meat not in terms of how you have historically perceived their value but in terms of how to cook them to their best advantage.

The instructions (at right) and diagram (left), which you can read or show to whomever asks you how you want your meat cut up, are meant to give each of eight to 12 people something off the loin, shoulder, leg, and belly. They require that each primal be divided into as many small pieces as possible (within reason!), so that sharing them is more like dealing a deck of cards than divvying up furniture. Remember, the priority is parity, not preference.

Splitting a pig up among 12 takes away the grade-school consolation that your neighbor is getting the same thing as you. The shares will not be identical: Four people will get the tenderloin and eight will not. Two people will get spare ribs and ten will not.

So it is essential to Cook, to know that a salt-brined leg roast, which usually weighs around 2 pounds, can be browned in a cast-iron pan, roasted to mid-rare, and served in whatever way pork chops would, and that exotic pork shanks can be coaxed into tenderness just as easily as a shoulder roast can. There are lessons to learn, too, about how different and clear food tastes when it has benefited from this much consideration. m

### FOR A 180-POUND LIVE-WEIGHT PIG

The weights are approximate; they are only there to give you an idea, and can be discussed with a rancher or butcher.

8 boneless shoulder roasts (2# per)
14 packages of chops (2 per pack; 1# per package)
18 packages belly (1.5# per pack)
2 packages spare ribs (3# each)
2 tenderloins (.5# each)
4 shanks (2# each)
2 packages trotters (2 per pack, 1# per package)
12 bone-in leg roasts (2# each)
12# sausage
Neck bones (give these to whomever wants them.)

Use the worksheet below to divide the cuts you get into equivalent shares. There are spaces here for 12 shares, but you can do more or less. You just include the roasting cuts in the grilling category if you are trying to share the pig among more people.

| | GRILLING CUTS: chops, tenderloin | BRAISING CUTS: shoulder, belly, spare ribs, shanks, trotters | ROASTING CUTS: leg | SAUSAGE | POUNDAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | |