

MEAT MATTERS

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Consumers on tight budgets are seeking ways to cope with rising food prices caused from the diversion of animal feed to fuel. Informed consumers can make wise choices to help off-set rising food prices. There are many values in the meat case and the experts at the American Meat Institute in Washington, DC, are eager to share information about them.

Start With a Plan

- Every shopping trip should start with a plan—a meal plan that leverages sale items and coupons. Get organized with a shopping list, the weekly promotions and coupons. This triple effort will result in real savings if you are able to coordinate the use of coupons with weekly advertised meat specials. Plan at least a week's worth of entrées so you can profit from the weekly specials.
- Utilize coupons from a variety of sources like newspapers and magazines, on-line grocery coupons from popular coupon web sites, in-store coupons that are dispensed throughout the supermarket. To maximize your returns, shop on double and triple coupon days.
- Join frequent-shopper programs at each of the grocery stores where you shop. The stores' incentive programs can slice a percentage off your total food bill.

Stock Up and Save

- Stock up on sale meat items and Value/ Family packs to fill your freezer. While it is safe to freeze meat in the original packaging, it is best to wrap the meat in freezer-safe plastic bags, heavy duty aluminum foil, freezer paper or plastic wrap.
- If you purchase a large meat value pack, be sure to portion the meats in quantities suitable for your household and freeze the packages individually. Stack burgers and chops between a double layer of waxed paper. Be sure to label each package with the name of the contents and the date it is frozen. To prevent freezer burn, be sure to press out all the air in each container and make sure the packages

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are air-tight.

- When you buy pre-cut meats like beef stew cubes or kabobs you are paying for the food and labor. Use your own sharp knife to cut a chuck roast into stew meat for example.

Plan for Leftovers

There is no need to re-invent every weeknight meal. Plan dinners so you will have leftovers to use for later meals. You'll save time, energy and supermarket dollars when you plan ahead to buy and prepare enough servings for more than one meal. The concept can be as simple as just buying double the quantity you would normally use to feed your household then plan to serve the same entrée another night. Hold the entrée in the refrigerator for up to three to four days or freeze it for up to two to three months. Or make the leftovers more innovative by incorporating them into another recipe—a "planned-over." Some favorite planned-overs are listed below.

Cooked Beef Planned-Overs

- Leftover roast beef or steak can become a "planned over" beef quesadillas (see the accompanying recipe) for an ethnic twist.
- Convert the flavors of roasted beef to Asian beef stir-fry flavored with fresh ginger, julienne bell peppers, scallions with orange zest and segments.
- Transform leftover cooked roast beef into creamy beef stroganoff with mushrooms and served over egg noodles.
- Utilize leftover hamburgers by crumbling the cooked patties into spaghetti and lasagna sauces.
- Disguise Sunday's leftover roast beef in colorful fajitas for a quick evening supper. Sprinkle fajita seasonings on sliced onions and peppers. Sauté the vegetables until tender, then add thinly sliced cooked roast beef to the vegetables and heat until warm.
- Enhance canned or homemade vegetable or minestrone soup with chunks of leftover beef.

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- Use cubes of roast beef for a cold weather Southwestern tortilla soup.
- Beef up dark green leafy salads with thin strips of cooked roast beef tossed with grape tomatoes, Feta cheese and balsamic vinaigrette.
- Boost the flavor of leftover roast beef in a crispy beef taco salad. Mix cooked beef cubes with onions, black beans, oregano, chili powder, peppers, tomato, lettuce and cilantro. Serve in tostada crowns or taco shells.

Cooked Pork Planned-Overs

- Prepare Asian lettuce wraps with leftover cooked pork loin or roast.
- Offer enchiladas with second-night cooked pork mixed with salsa, cilantro and Jack cheese.
- Transform leftover pork chops into a quick entrée of pork fried rice with the addition of cooked rice, ginger, scallions, vegetables and eggs.
- Invent a new version of the grilled Monte Cristo sandwich by tucking thin slices of cooked pork with Swiss cheese between bread slices.
- Offer the classic Cuban sandwich with leftover cooked sliced pork, ham and cheese.
- Enhance a package or homemade potato soup with the addition of cooked pork cubes.
- Present a fusion salad with leftover julienne pork and cooked pasta in a sweet sesame dressing.

Know the Shelf Life of Different Types of Meat

While many meat products carry use by dates on the package, many others do not. Some consumers are unsure about how long meat may be stored in the refrigerator or freezer. It's good to be cautious, but discarding wholesome meat because you are uncertain about its shelf life can also be money down the drain.

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Remember to follow the use by date and evaluate the meat based upon its visual and sensory qualities. Meat that has never been frozen but is past its use by date or that has an odor, off-color or slimy appearance should be discarded. The following charts offer general guidelines for safe meat storage but it's important to remember—shelf life can range depending upon a variety of factors that include storage temperature and exposure to oxygen. Use the charts below and on the next page as general guidance.

RECOMMENDED STORAGE FOR BEEF

Cut of Beef	Refrigeration at 35°F to 40°F	Freezer at 0°F or below
Fresh Steaks, Roasts and Ribs	3 – 4 days	6 – 12 months
Cubes or Strips of Beef (<i>for stew, kabobs or stir-fry</i>)	2 – 3 days	6 – 12 months
Ground Beef	1 – 2 days	3 – 4 months
All Cooked Leftover Beef – including soup, stews and casseroles	3 – 4 days	2 – 3 months
Sliced Deli Roast Beef	3 – 5 days	1 – 2 months
Hot Dogs (<i>sealed/ unopened package</i>)	2 weeks or 1 week after the use-by date on the package	1 – 2 months
Hot Dogs (<i>opened package</i>)	4 – 7 days	1 – 2 months

Reference: USDA FSIS and NCBA

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RECOMMENDED STORAGE FOR PORK

Cut of Pork	Refrigeration at 35°F to 40°F	Freezer at 0°F or below
Roasts, Tenderloin, Ribs and Chops	2 – 4 days	4 – 6 months
Ground Pork	1 – 2 days	3 months
All Cooked Leftover Pork, including soup, stews and casseroles	3 – 4 days	3 months
Sliced Deli Ham	3 – 5 days	1 – 2 months
Hot Dogs (<i>unopened package</i>)	Follow use-by or sell-by dates on package use within 2 weeks	
Hot Dogs (<i>opened package</i>)	7 days	1 – 2 months

Reference: USDA FSIS and NPB

Shop for Value Cuts

Cuts of meat from the shoulder and leg are well-exercised muscles, are more lean and have a coarse grain. These cuts are very flavorful and are generally considered a “value cut” because they cost less but deliver good flavor and a large amount of meat. These less tender cuts can be tenderized by several methods:

- Marinate in a liquid containing an acid such as vinegar, wine, lemon or lime juice. As the meat stands in the liquid, the acid breaks down the less tender cuts of meat. The formula for liquid to meat is 1/2 cup of liquid per 1 pound of meat. Since marinades only penetrate about 1/4-inch into meats, it is key to use a cut that is relatively thin.
- Always marinate meats, in a covered container, in the refrigerator. Use a sealable food-grade plastic bag, glass or stainless steel container so the acid marinade does not react with the container. To ensure all the meat comes into contact with the liquid, use a container that is just large enough to hold the meat.
- If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce

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on the cooked meat, reserve a portion of the marinade before adding the raw meat. Or you may rapidly boil the used marinade to destroy any harmful bacteria before adding it to cooked meats. Otherwise, discard the leftover marinade and do not add it to any other foods.

- Pound steaks with the flat side of a meat mallet. Pound from the center of the steak to the edges.
- Score steaks or roasts with a sharp knife. Make diagonal shallow cuts across the surface to cut the long muscle fibers.
- Use a low heat and moist-cooking method to soften the connective tissues that run through the muscles. Both the slow cooker and braising cooking methods are perfect cooking techniques for value cuts.
- Holding a sharp knife at an angle, slice roasts and steaks, across the grain, on the diagonal, into very thin slices. Slicing across the grain shortens the long muscle fibers and results in a more tender product. This procedure is beneficial for cutting raw meat for stir-fry recipes and carving cooked meats as the final tenderizing technique.

The following recipes feature beef value cuts that make delicious, hearty meals for families on a budget. The mix of recipes includes some old stand-bys along with flavorful and innovative ethnic fare.

Spicy Country-Style Pork Ribs

Servings: 4 to 5

½ cup finely chopped onion

⅓ cup Tabasco pepper sauce
with chipotle

⅓ cup ketchup

¼ cup honey

2 Tablespoons cider vinegar

1 Tablespoon prepared stone ground
mustard

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

3+ pounds pork country-style ribs,

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trimmed of excess fat, trimmed to fit
in slow cooker

1. Preheat slow cooker on HIGH heat.
2. Mix first six ingredients together in the slow cooker.
3. Rub salt and pepper into ribs. Add ribs to slow cooker. Stir to coat all rib surfaces.
4. Cover and cook on LOW heat for 6 hours or on HIGH heat for 3 ½ hours, or until ribs are tender.
5. Spoon off fat from the surface.
6. Transfer sauce to a medium heavy saucepan. Boil sauce, uncovered, for about 20 minutes to achieve a thicker consistency, stirring occasionally.
7. Return ribs and thickened sauce to slow cooker and coat ribs with thickened sauce. Cook, uncovered, until all ingredients are heated throughout.

Italian Beef Kebabs

Yield: 4 entrée portions

- 1 pound top round steak, no more than
¾-inch thick, trimmed of all fat
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- 2 Tablespoons cold water
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh garlic
- 1 Tablespoon dried Italian herb seasonings
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- ½ teaspoon each salt and freshly ground
black pepper
- 1 large green bell pepper, seeded and cut
into 1-inch cubes
- 1 small sweet (Vidalia) onion, cut into 1-inch
wedges
- ¾ cup grape or cherry tomatoes, washed

1. Cut beef into ½-inch cubes.
2. Mix oil, vinegar, water, garlic, herbs and seasonings together in a food-safe plastic bag or an 11 x 9 inch non-reactive glass or stainless steel dish. Add beef, coating all surfaces with liquid.

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3. Cover and marinate, in refrigerator, a minimum of 10 hours but no more than 20 hours. (Marinating longer than 24 hours may result in a mushy texture.) Turn the beef several times to ensure even exposure to the marinade.
4. Thread beef and vegetables on five 15-inch metal or bamboo skewers (if using bamboo, soak skewers in cold water for 30 minutes). Brush each kebab with marinade then discard remaining marinade.
5. Grill kebabs over direct medium heat about 4 inches from heat source. Grill for 7-8 minutes turning skewers every 2 minutes. Or cook in a preheated broiler, 4 inches from heat.
6. Cook until beef reaches an internal temperature of 145°F and vegetables are tender.

* See Marinating Tips above

Hearty Beef and Beer Stew

Yield: 8 entrée portions

3+ pounds boneless chuck roast, trimmed
of fat, silver and gristle

1 ½ teaspoons each salt and freshly
ground black pepper

2 ½ teaspoons dried thyme, DIVIDED

3 Tablespoons canola oil, DIVIDED

1 pound onions (4 cups coarsely chopped)

1 Tablespoon minced fresh garlic

⅓ cup flour

1 (10.5 oz) can reduced-sodium chicken
broth

1 cup dark beer

2 bay leaves

½ teaspoon salt and freshly ground black
pepper

2 cups fresh baby carrots, peeled

1. Pat beef dry with clean paper towels. Cut beef into 1 ½ inch cubes. Mix salt, pepper and 1 ½ teaspoons thyme together and sprinkle on beef.
2. Working in batches, heat 1 tablespoon oil in a non-stick large, heavy Dutch oven over medium-

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- high heat. Add enough beef, in a single layer, to cover pan surface. Brown beef on all sides, taking care not to crowd the pan. Transfer cooked beef to a bowl. Repeat twice using remaining oil and beef. Place all cooked beef in bowl.
3. Add onions to the hot pan and scrape pan to loosen browned bits. Stir-fry until onions are tender, 4 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook only until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
 4. Sprinkle flour over onions and stir to coat onions. Continue to cook flour about 1 minute.
 5. Slowly add broth and beer, stirring constantly to blend liquid with flour.
 6. Add bay leaves, remaining thyme, salt and pepper. Return beef and juices to pan.
 7. Bring to a boil. Immediately reduce heat and simmer, covered about 1½ hours, stirring occasionally. Stir in carrots. Continue to gently simmer in covered pan until beef and carrots are tender, about 45 to 60 minutes.
 8. Skim fat off the surface. Remove bay leaves.
 9. If desired, remove beef and simmer liquid, uncovered, until it is reduced and thickened. Return beef to pan and heat thoroughly.
 10. Serve atop hot cooked egg noodles.

Pulled Pork Sandwiches

Serves: 8 Sandwiches

- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 (3 pound) fresh pork shoulder or butt, trimmed of fat
- 2 cups chopped onion
- ½ cup ketchup
- 1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 Tablespoons cider vinegar
- ¼ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 8 sandwich buns, sliced and toasted

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1. Preheat slow cooker on HIGH heat for approximately 15 minutes.
2. Meanwhile mix salt, pepper and crushed pepper together. Rub evenly into pork.
3. Mix onion, ketchup, Worcestershire, vinegar, sugar and mustard together in slow cooker.
4. Add pork and spoon mixture atop pork. Cover and cook on LOW for 8 hours or until fork tender.
5. Remove pork from cooker. Skim fat from the sauce. Allow pork to slightly cool for 10 minutes. With the lid off, turn cooker to HIGH setting and let sauce cook.
6. Shred pork with 2 forks, discarding all fat. Return shredded pork to slow cooker with enough sauce to cover. Heat throughout.
7. Hold pulled pork on LOW setting, with the lid on, until ready to serve or up to 1 hour.
8. Using a slotted spoon (to drain sauce) portion shredded pork on each bun.

Szechuan Pork Stir-Fry

Yield: 4 entrée portions

- 1 pound boneless pork sirloin chops, trimmed of any fat
- 2 Tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 3 Tablespoons dry sherry
- 3 Tablespoons less-sodium soy sauce
- 2 Tablespoons cold water
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh garlic
- 2 teaspoons canola oil, DIVIDED
- 1 medium sweet onion, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch strips
- 2 large carrots, peeled and cut diagonally into 1/8-inch slices
- 1 large green bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced into 1/4-inch strips
- 4 ounces button mushrooms, stems

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removed and sliced thin

1. Thinly slice pork across grain into thin 1 x ¼-inch strips.
2. In a medium bowl, mix hoisin, sherry, soy sauce, water, cornstarch, ginger, sugar, crushed pepper, black pepper and garlic. Add pork, stir to coat all surfaces and marinate.
3. Over medium-high heat, preheat a large wok or large, deep, heavy skillet for 30 seconds; add 1 teaspoon oil and preheat until very hot.
4. Add vegetables and stir-fry, with a wooden spoon, for 4 to 6 minutes or until crisp tender. Remove from wok and set aside.
5. Add remaining oil and heat for 30 seconds. With a slotted spoon, transfer pork from hoisin mixture into hot wok. Wait 30 seconds before stirring so pork can begin to brown. Then stir-fry only 1 to 2 minutes or just until pork is no longer pink.
6. Push pork up the sides of the wok and add hoisin mixture to middle of wok. Stir-fry until bubbly and thick.
7. Return vegetables to wok and stir-fry to heat all ingredients thoroughly.
8. Serve with hot rice.

Eye of Round Beef Roast with Herbs

Servings: 8

2 to 3 pound eye of round beef roast
2 teaspoons minced fresh garlic
2 teaspoons dried thyme
1 teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon ground cayenne red pepper
1 teaspoon salt (kosher preferred)
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1. Trim beef of all fat and outside silver skin.
2. Mix garlic, thyme, oregano, cayenne, salt and pepper together in a small bowl. Pat roast dry and coat exterior of roast with herb mixture.
3. Loosely cover roast and return it to the refrigerator

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to marinate in herb coating for 2 hours or up to 24 hours.

4. Place roast on a rack, within a roasting pan, coated with cooking spray. Tuck thin-end of roast under to compensate for uneven thickness.
5. Cook in a preheated 450°F for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 300°F. Continue to cook until internal temperature of roast reaches 145°F, about 1 ¼ to 1 ¾ hours. (For ease of slicing, cook only to medium rare stage.)
6. Transfer to a warm platter and loosely cover with fresh foil. Allow roast to stand for 15 minutes before carving. Cut, on the diagonal, into very thin slices.

Roast Beef Quesadillas

Servings: 4

- 2 teaspoons canola oil
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 1 large fresh jalapeno, seeded and minced
- 2 cups diced cooked/leftover medium-rare roast beef with any juices
- ½ cup thick or chunky salsa
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Vegetable cooking spray
- 4 (10-inch) soft flour tortillas or wraps, (Mexican flavor preferred)
- 1 cup shredded Mexican cheeses blend
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves
- Extra salsa, if desired

1. Over medium heat, in a medium-size skillet, heat oil until hot. Add onions and jalapeno. Sauté until onions are tender. Stir in beef and stir-fry until beef is warm. Stir in salsa and salt and heat briefly. Remove from heat.
2. For each quesadilla: Over medium heat, lightly spray an 11-inch to 12-inch skillet with cooking spray, place one tortilla in skillet and heat for 20 seconds. Turn over and sprinkle warm side with ¼ cup cheese. Place ⅔ cup of beef mixture and 1 heaping tablespoon cilantro evenly on one-half of tortilla.
3. When cheese melts and all ingredients are hot, fold

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tortilla in half, pressing the edges together. Remove from skillet and cut each quesadilla into 4 wedges. Serve warm with additional salsa, if desired.

Greek Lamb Burger

Yield: 4 burgers

- 1 pound ground American lamb
- ¼ cup finely chopped green onions
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh garlic
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano leaves, DIVIDED
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ cup nonfat plain yogurt
- ½ cup peeled and minced cucumber
- ¼ cup crumbled Feta cheese (basil and tomato flavored, preferred)
- 4 onion rolls, split

1. Preheat grill or broiler.
2. Gently mix lamb with onions, garlic, 1 teaspoon oregano, cinnamon, salt and pepper. Form into four ½-inch thick burgers.
3. Grill or broil 4 to 5 inches from heat source 5 to 6 minutes on each side or until the internal temperature reaches the desired degree of doneness: 145°F for medium-rare to 160°F for medium.
4. Grill rolls, cut side down, only until warm.
5. Meanwhile, mix yogurt, remaining oregano and cucumber together. Cover and reserve in the refrigerator.
6. For each burger, spread 2 tablespoons sauce on each roll half and add 1 tablespoon Feta on bottom roll half. Top with burgers and cover with remaining roll half.

Mediterranean Lamb Chops with Red Wine Sauce

Yield: 4 entrees

- 4 American lamb shoulder* chops, ½-inch thick, trimmed of excess fat
- ¾ teaspoon coarse salt

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- 1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- ½ cup chopped sweet onion
- 1 cup cleaned and sliced mushrooms
- 1 ½ teaspoons fresh rosemary, chopped fine OR
- ½ teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh garlic
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can petite diced tomatoes
- ½ cup dry red wine
- Rosemary for garnish

1. Pat lamb dry with clean paper towels. Press salt and pepper into lamb.
2. Heat oil in a large, heavy nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add lamb and cook about 3 minutes on each side or until brown. Transfer lamb to a platter.
3. Reduce heat setting and remove all but 1 teaspoon fat from pan. Add onions, mushrooms and rosemary and stir-fry 3 to 4 minutes or just until onions are tender. With a wooden spoon, scrap up any browned bits. Add garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and wine.
4. Return lamb to skillet and cover. Gently simmer 40 to 50 minutes, turning lamb once or twice. Cook until lamb is tender.
5. Remove lamb from skillet; cover and keep warm. Increase heat and boil sauce 10-15 minutes or until slightly reduced. Spoon tomato mixture atop each lamb chop. Sprinkle with additional rosemary.

*Arm shoulder chops preferred

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