

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Adding Lamb to Spring Meals*

I know, I know. This is cattle country. Generally speaking, we all love a nice juicy beef steak on our plate. Hear me out though. Maybe even consider sprucing up your Spring meals with a new protein, like lamb. In many countries, young sheep called a lamb, is the major source of protein. Sheep are the oldest domesticated meat species, having been raised by humans beginning about 9,000 years ago in the Middle East.

Lamb meat is very nutritious and packed with flavor. According to Michigan State University Extension, “Lamb meat is packed full of protein, with lean lamb offering 48% of the daily value (DV) of protein. It is also a great source of B vitamins. Lamb offers 37% DV of vitamin B-12, which is important in body cell function and the nervous system and 27% DV of niacin, important for healthy skin, nerves and digestion. Zinc is also available in lamb with 30 percent DV being provided in an average three ounce serving. This important mineral is needed for a healthy immune system and to help the body repair tissue, form enzymes and insulin.”

Preparing lamb is not as complex as some might think. The [American Lamb Board](#) website and [USDA: Lamb from farm to table](#) website provide some delicious recipes and information on preparing lamb safely. Understanding how to prepare lamb is just as important as understanding the quality grades of a lamb carcass. Let’s take a look at those:

A typical Prime carcass having minimum conformation qualifications for this grade tend to be thickly muscled throughout, are moderately wide and thick in relation to their length and have moderately plump and full legs, moderately wide and thick backs, and moderately thick and full shoulders.

A typical Choice carcass having minimum conformation qualifications for this grade are slightly thick muscled throughout, they tend to be slightly wide and thick in relation to their length and tend to have slightly plump and full legs, slightly wide and thick backs, and slightly thick and full shoulders.

A typical Good carcass having minimum qualifications for this grade are slightly thin muscled throughout, are moderately narrow in relation to their length and have slightly thin, tapering legs, and slightly narrow and thin backs and shoulders. The Utility grade includes those lamb carcasses whose characteristics are inferior to those specified as minimum for the Good grade.

Information comes from Kansas State University food scientist, Karen Blakeslee, Michigan State University Extension, and the USDA food safety website.