

Tips for local beef sourcing:

All beef intended for institutional food service must be slaughtered and processed under USDA inspection. For a full explanation of meat inspection requirements, see the [Regulatory Routes to Purchasing Michigan Meat](#) infographic from the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems.

Beef can be purchased in two primary ways:

1. as premade products or individual cuts from a processor or distributor, or
2. as a half or whole animal direct from the farm.

While buying a whole animal may offer cost savings per pound, it creates other challenges with menu planning, order logistics, and [inventory management](#). Buying beef products à la carte from a distributor is the most common approach.

Ground product (e.g. burger patties) are generally the lowest cost. Whole muscle cuts like steaks or roasts tend to be more expensive and may require more preparation.

Blending ground beef with vegetables, beans, and pulses can help keep costs in check and enhance flavor. Many conventional ground beef products, such as patties or taco filler, contain 10-30% textured soy protein. Custom blended burgers can be made in-house or by an inspected meat processor.

There are many beef production practices, breeds of cattle, and product grades that each impact price. A large proportion of commodity ground beef actually comes from spent (or cull) dairy cows, which contributes to the low cost. Sourcing beef from a small farm may be more expensive than conventional beef products.

Procurement strategies:

- **Broadline distributor:** For many institutions, working through their prime vendor is the ideal solution. While broadline distributors are great at order fulfillment and customer service, most do not offer local beef on their product lists. Connect and refer prospective beef suppliers to your broadline sales representative to see if they are willing to add a new product or vendor.
- **Specialty distributor or food hub:** Smaller, more regionally focused distributors may be able to offer more variety when it comes to locally sourced meats. Seeking out ground products or low demand cuts may help keep costs under control.
- **Direct from USDA processor:** Some meat processors may be able to source, process and deliver locally raised beef direct to an institution. Start by contacting the [USDA- inspected processors in your area](#) to see if they offer these services.
- **Direct from farmer/ producer:** For smaller institutions, particularly those in rural areas, sourcing whole animals direct from the farm may be the best option. This approach requires close planning and coordination the farm and a USDA processor.
- **Donations:** In cattle producing areas like [Montana](#) some schools have accepted donated cattle and only pay the processing costs.



Michigan Beef Sources

Producers:

Moraine Park Farms/Michigan Craft Beef (Hudsonville)

michigancraftbeef.com/

Wernette Beef (Remus)

wernettebeef.com/

Farm directories:

localharvest.org

mi.foodmarketmaker.com/

eatwild.com/index.html

USDA Processor/ Specialty Distributors:

Byron Center Meats (Byron Center)

byroncentermeats.com/

Cherry Capital Foods (statewide)

cherrycapitalfoods.com

Eat Local, Eat Natural (Ann Arbor)

eatlocaleatnatural.com

Ebel's General Store/ Little Town Jerky (Falmouth)

ebelsgeneralstore.com/meat-processing/

https://www.ebelsgeneralstore.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/little_town_foodservice.pdf

Farm Field Table (Ferndale)

farmfieldtable.com/

Tolman's Wholesale Meats (Hudsonville)

tolmansmeats.com/

West Michigan Beef Company (Hudsonville)

westmichiganbeef.com/