

How to choose a butcher

How to compare value per kilo rather than per pack, what dry ageing actually means, and getting a cut done the way you want it

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Comparing a butcher with a supermarket is mostly a comparison of packaging. Per-kilogram pricing, trim, and whether they will cut to order are what actually decide which is cheaper, and the answer is different depending on what you are buying.

What it should cost

Ask for the per-kilogram price of the specific cut. A supermarket pack and a butcher's tray are frequently different weights, different trim levels and different fat content, so the shelf price is not a like-for-like comparison. Mince, sausages and diced meat are usually the closest comparison; steak and roasts are not.

Bulk and mixed packs normally carry a lower per-kilo price than individual cuts. Ask what the pack contains and whether items can be swapped, because a cheap pack of cuts you will not eat is not cheap.

Cutting to order, trimming and butterflying are usually included in the per-kilo price. Ask, because a butcher who charges extra for it is unusual and worth knowing about.

What the law requires

Butchers are subject to food safety standards and council registration, and meat must be sourced from licensed processors. Traceability requirements mean a butcher should be able to tell you where the meat came from, at least at the level of the processor or the region.

If a butcher claims meat is Tasmanian or from a named farm, that claim is subject to the Australian Consumer Law, and country-of-origin labelling rules apply to packaged meat. A claim that cannot be supported is a misrepresentation.

For processed items such as sausages and marinated cuts, allergen information must be available. Ask if it is not displayed.

Red flags

Refusal to quote a per-kilogram price.

A local or Tasmanian claim with no substance behind it when asked.

No allergen information available for processed products.

Meat displayed without any indication of its origin.

Bulk packs priced per pack with no indication of the weight.

What good looks like

Per-kilo prices are displayed or stated without hesitation.

They cut and trim to order as a matter of course.

They can name the region or the processor the meat came from.

They explain dry ageing and its effect on yield and price honestly.

Allergen information for their own processed products is available on request.

What to ask

- "What is the price per kilo of this cut?"
- "Will you cut it to order, and does that cost extra?"
- "Where does this meat come from, and is it Tasmanian?"
- "What does dry-aged mean here, and what is the ageing period?"
- "What is in the sausages, and are there allergens I should know about?"
- "Can I order a bulk pack and swap items in it?"

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