

Butcher

Break down whole animals into cuts people cook. Learn it on the job, paid, from week one.

TYPICAL PAY

\$40,140

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$58k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Grocery stores, butcher shops,
meat plants, restaurants**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or GED (General Educational Development) test** Grade 12
Useful but not always required. Show up on time and you are ahead of most applicants.
- 2 Get hired in a meat department** Right away
Start as a clerk: wrapping, weighing, pricing, cleaning. This is the real entry point.
- 3 Learn the cuts** Several months to a year
Your first months are basic portioning. A few weeks gets you the simple cuts, and a year gets you most of the work.
- 4 Apprenticeship or in-house program** 1 to 2 years
Registered apprenticeships exist for meat cutting, combining paid work with related instruction and ending in a recognized credential.
- 5 Head butcher** 3 to 5 years in
Ordering, cutting tests, managing the case and training the next clerk.

Pros and cons

- + Paid from week one with no tuition at all
- + A real craft you can see improving month by month
- + Union grocery jobs come with a pay scale and a pension
- Cold, wet, loud rooms and hands that ache
- Genuine injury risk from saws, grinders and very sharp knives
- Pay tops out lower than most trades on this site

Good to know

The work happens near freezing

Cutting rooms are held at about 40 degrees Fahrenheit so the meat stays safe. Butchers wear layers under their coats and a steel mesh glove on the hand that holds the meat.

Supermarkets cut fewer animals every year

The federal career profile lists this occupation as growing slower than average, largely because chains now buy meat already cut and boxed at the plant. The skilled whole-animal work has shifted to indepen...

Optional boosts

Whole-animal butchery. Charcuterie and sausage making. Dry aging. Halal or kosher certification.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Butchers and Meat Cutters (51-3021.00)
Apprenticeship.gov: United States Department of Labor
American Meat Science Association
United States Department of Labor: apprenticeship

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/butcher>



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