

## Butchery Class

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[HOST INTRO] More and more people are getting directly involved in food. Growing it, cooking it, even blogging about it. Some are going still further: plunging — literally— into the meat of the matter.

In this installment of Edible Idaho, correspondent Guy Hand visits a class where every student wields a knife — and the desire to learn the fading art of butchery.

A word of caution ... guy's story this morning (afternoon) is about meat cutting — so some of our listeners may be uncomfortable with the subject matter. (5:16 to soc out; music ends at 5:38)

[HOST OUTRO] For more on this story or to listen to past Edible Idaho programs, go to [northwest food news dot com](http://northwestfoodnews.com).

### [SCRIPT]

1.(Butcher blues music) (Hand) There was a time when the word “butcher” didn’t dredge up thoughts of slasher movie mayhem. (Music: I bought a meat shop just the other day . . .) The neighborhood butcher was as revered as the baker and the candlestick maker. But in the ‘60s, as industrial meat packers began delivering pre-cut chops to supermarkets, America’s butchers started closing shop. (Music: I guess I’ll have to sell it ‘cause I’m givin’ too much away . . . )

Today, though, a revival has begun. As small-scale producers of quality meats and poultry proliferate, so too has an interest in artisanal meat cutting. And that brings me to Hailey, Idaho and a classroom strewn with lamb carcasses.

2. (Sounds in classroom) (Cheryl Bennett) Excuse me. I’d like to welcome everyone to our first ever butchery class . . .

3. (Hand) That’s Cheryl Bennett of Lava Lake Lamb, a small-scale producer of organic lamb based in the Wood River Valley. Lava Lake Lamb is sponsoring this one-day class for more than a dozen people.

4. (Bennett) . . . This kind of came about for several reasons. We had been seeing some articles and some web stuff about butchery classes and it's kind of the vogue thing right now, which is fairly interesting.

5. (Hand) Butchery classes are becoming surprisingly popular in cities like New York, San Francisco and Portland, Oregon. There are so few old-fashioned butchers left in America they've attracted a rock star's following of knife-wielding groupies, some willing to pay thousands of dollars to learn this arcane art. Many plan to open their own boutique shops. But people *at this* class are here for more personal reasons.

6. (O'Sullivan) I'm just really interested in good food and knowing where it comes from, so I'm excited to start from the beginning here . . . (French) Shot my first deer this year and had somebody else butcher it and I want to get one step closer to the ground, shall we say . . . (Roth) We're fascinated in and interested in providing local, good organic food for ourselves and our two and a half year old daughter . . . (Worth) I like to cook and I thought it would be fun to learn more about cuts of meat. I've got an anniversary coming up and I think this would be a really good idea for a gift for my wife (laughter).

7. (Jones) OK, if you'll just kind of gather around the table . . .

8. (Hand) Long-time Rigby butcher Brent Jones is teaching the class. He stands, knife in hand, over a pink, skinless lamb carcass, it's legs outstretched as if to leap away.

9. (Jones) A lamb is broken down into four major primal cuts. A primal cut is anything that is in a solid piece before it goes into a portion steak.

10. (Hand) Jones grabs a hoof-less leg and pulls it toward him.

11. (Jones) We have a leg. On that leg is a shank and that's considered one piece.

12. (Hand) No one seems the least bit squeamish. There's no blood, no guts. The carcass is clean and smells fresh, if slightly metallic in that raw-meat way. When Jones plunges his knife into the animal, people lean forward.

13. (Jones) Right here is where your tri-tip comes from . . .

14. (Hand) Brent Jones thinks this growing nationwide interest in butchery is born, in part, from fear — a fear that our modern food system isn't safe.

15. (Jones) Everybody's concerned about where their food's coming from. And that's all started since, in my opinion, 911. You know everybody's worried about terrorists, they're worried about contamination, they're worried about recalls on all these meats. People want to know where they can get product from birth to plate and what I mean by that where the animal was born at and how it has been handled before they put it on their plate to eat it.

16. (Hand) The recent recall of yet more E-coli tainted beef and the revelation that some producers sterilize their meat products with ammonia, well, that leaves a bad taste in many consumer's mouths. Some become vegetarians, but others have decided to take personal control over the meat they eat. Still, Jane Timberlake looks a little perplexed as she cuts into her lamb carcass.

17. (Timberlake) (Laughing) I'm just trying to get through some of the bigger cuts and then remember what some of the smaller pieces are. I'm waiting for them to pop out at me. (Hand) And have you done this sort of thing before? (Timberlake) Ah, closest I've come was Thanksgiving, just deboning a turkey breast so this is a little bit bigger. (laughs)

18. (Hand) Scott Mason, a local restaurateur, thinks learning the art of butchery will make participants more sophisticated cooks and consumers.

19. (Mason) For a lot of people I think food had become something that they bought prepackaged and they didn't understand even what they were eating. And so I think most of the people here if you said this is a top sirloin cut, they'd say oh, a top sirloin cut, they know exactly where that comes from . . .

20. (Hand) Mason thinks a butchery class can also make the abstract real, reminding us how meat gets to our plates.

21. (Mason) You know, if you can't understand where it comes from and what it actually is that you're eating, you shouldn't be eating it. And I think

it's really important to know that these are whole animals, they were alive once, we killed them so we could eat them.

22. (Hand) That's, of course, why most of us pass the butchery off to others. Facing the facts of meat means facing life and death. Still, by distancing ourselves from our food, a growing number of eaters believe we've lost control of what we eat. A butchery class is one way this knife-wielding gang of students hopes to retake that control.

23. (Hand) In Hailey, Idaho, I'm Guy Hand.