

# Buying Ham

*Ham is an even better value when you know portions.*

**H**am is a favorite because it is easy to prepare and goes well with a variety of foods and menus.

If ham is fully cooked, the label will say so. If the label makes no distinction, cook the ham before you eat it. Fully cooked hams may be served without more cooking, but heating to an internal temperature of 140° degrees improves flavor and texture.

## **The difference in ham portions...**

When ham is cut into portions, the center section may be removed and sold separately as ham steaks or center-cut slices. The ends are sold as "shank end" or "butt end." Usually the shank portion has more bone and the butt, more meat. No slices are removed from the half hams labeled "shank half" or "butt half."

## **When a picnic is not a picnic.**

A picnic is not really a ham, since it is cut from the shoulder and not from the hind leg. It usually has more waste and fat and may require longer cooking.

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*These are valuable tips on how to interpret the labels on hams.*



## **Bone-in vs boneless**

Think in terms of servings per pound to get the best buy. It's the price per serving that counts. A boneless ham will give three or four servings a pound, and a bone-in ham two or three servings.

"Water Added" on a label means only that the ham has retained extra water from the curing process. This moisture gives a juicier ham.

Store whole or half hams in the refrigerator at 40° degrees or lower for no longer than a week. Canned hams may be kept, unopened, for up to six months in the refrigerator. Freezing hams for long periods is not recommended because the salt used in curing can speed flavor changes. If you must freeze ham, wrap it in moisture-proof wrap, seal it tightly and freeze for one or two months.

*For more information on buying ham, contact your local county Extension office.*