OFFAL AT THE COOP—EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT ORGAN MEATS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

February 7, 2022



Above: Taco de Oreja, a taco made with pig ears.

By Travis Hartman

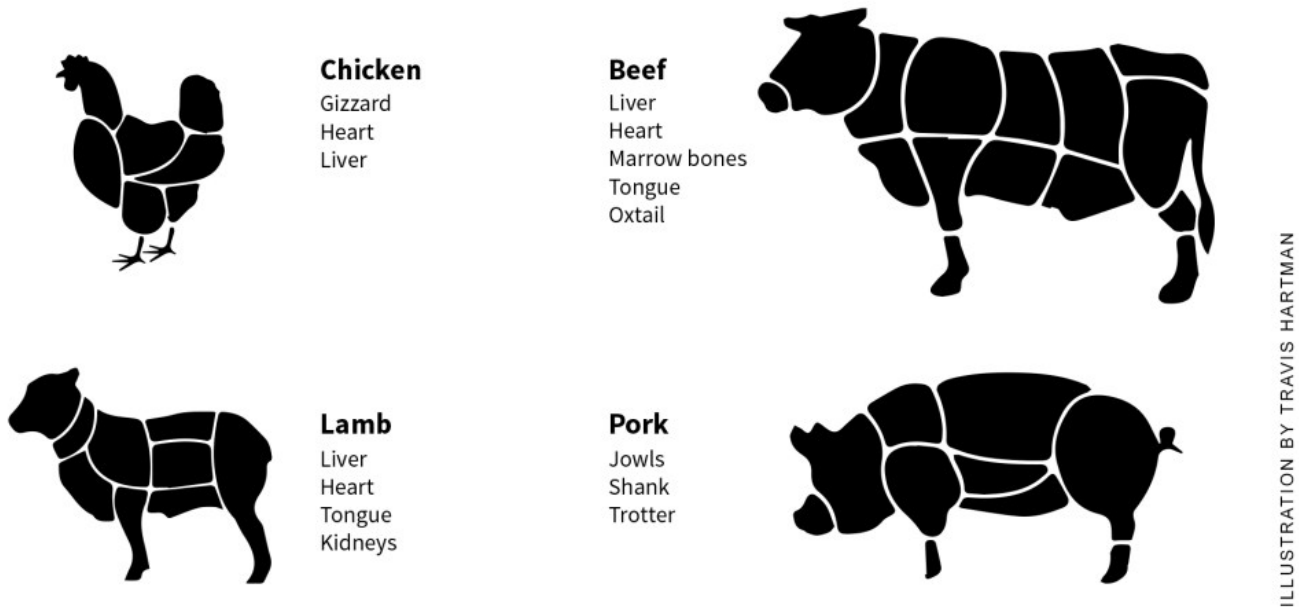
Offal, the butcher's term for organ meat, has fallen out of favor with Americans overall despite its affordability and incredible nutrition potential. Some say it would be more popular if only cooked properly, while some find the concept of eating organs and other non-typical animal products dispiriting. As the old one-liner about eating tongue goes, "I never came around to the idea of tasting something that might be tasting me back."

The Coop offers a wide range of offal in the freezers, with an array of sheep, beef, and chicken organs available year round. “We never have a problem selling offal,” said Coop Meat Buyer Margie Lempert, ”In general, livers are popular, particularly in the winter and around the holidays.”



Frozen beef heart in the Coop’s basement freezer.

Offal was a popular part of Americans’ diet through much of the country’s history. The historic reasoning behind many Americans’ negative attitudes arrived with the rise of mass-produced meats in the first half of the 20th century. The meatpacking industry created much easier access to the muscle meats of animals, which are, in some sense, easier to prepare in a tasty manner. Organ meats, which tend to require a little finesse in preparation, became less popular over the decades, and their prices dropped. And over time the low prices have associated offal with poverty, lowering their reputation even further across the country.



But the U.S. is a bit of an outlier with this attitude. In other countries around the world, these cuts are better understood and valued.

OFFAL WAS A POPULAR PART OF AMERICANS' DIET THROUGH MUCH OF THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY.

According to the most recent United Nations data, the United States was by far the largest exporter of edible offal meats, with the cuts largely landing in China (31%), Japan (25%) and Mexico (18%).

Today, offal remains a powerhouse of nutrition and is still generally much cheaper than muscle meats. While certain offal cuts have seen increased U.S. menu presence in the last decade by chefs espousing nose-to-tail eating, offal has always been firmly lodged in many cultural food traditions across the world, including Latin American, Asian, Russian, French and Polish.

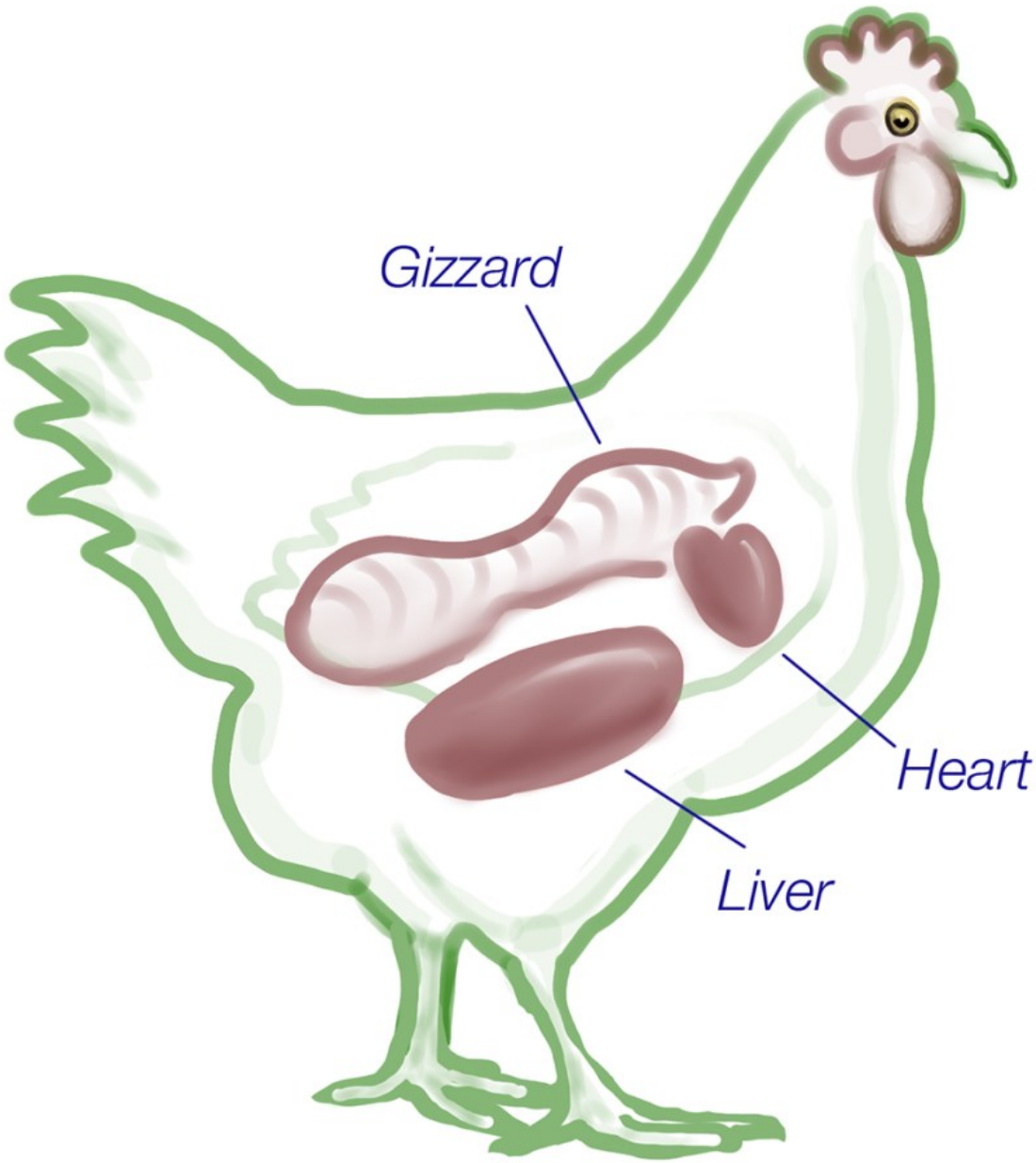


ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

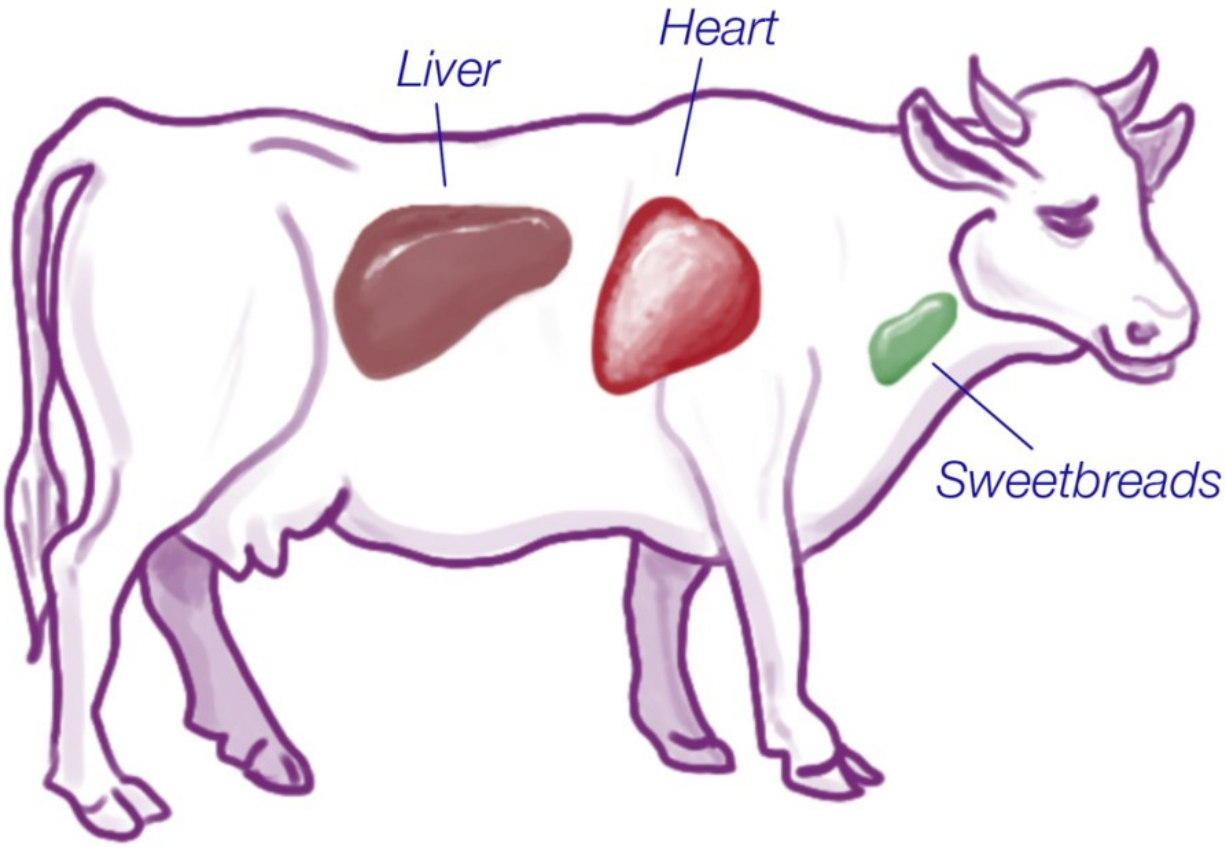


ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

WHAT IS AVAILABLE AT THE COOP

Offal comes in as part of the delivery of two whole steers a week and three whole lambs a week, with livers and other chicken organs as needed from Snowdance and Murrays. Lempert says there haven’t been any significant changes in purchasing habits, noting Coop members are pretty consistent with their offal consumption.

ORGAN MEATS ARE IN GENERAL MORE NUTRITIOUS THAN MUSCLE MEATS; THEY VARY IN TASTE FROM RICH AND SUCCULENT TO LEAN.

TONGUE

Offal cuts are in general more nutritious than muscle meats, and vary in taste from rich and succulent to lean. Tongue is relatively high in fat content and is a common taco filling when gently braised with onion, garlic and other spices until tender, then seared or shredded when added to the tortilla.

HEART

Beef heart is a much leaner meat and has a distinctly beefy flavor with a hint of game. It is low in fat and can be either quickly cooked like a steak (some say it's best to leave on the rare side of medium rare to keep it tender) or mixed into meatballs or hamburgers. One possible guideline: use it for no more than a third of the mixture, as it's very lean meat and you'll need fat to flavor the burger or meatball.

LIVER

Beef liver is one of the most nutritious foods on the planet, being high in protein, low in calories and having more vitamins and minerals than vegetables and fruits. The liver works to remove toxins from the bloodstream, but toxins are not stored in the liver, which is a common misunderstanding. It is, however, high in cholesterol, but despite that can be considered one of the most nutritionally dense foods on the planet.

Travis Hartman has been a Coop member for over a decade and is still finding new things to eat every time he shops.