



Savor the flap

A new cut of beef for grilling season

Flap steak.

The name is terrible. But, as off-putting as it might sound when surveying the butcher's case, if you give it a chance, you'll have a hard time choosing tri-tip over flap steak the next time you grill.

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In the words of the brother-in-law who introduced it to me, flap steak is, in fact, a "beautiful" cut of meat. On his recommendation, I've kept my preparation simple: salt, grill, rest, slice. And it tastes

incredible. It has a deep beefy flavor and slightly chewy texture while remaining uncommonly tender, even along the well-done edges (something that cannot be said for a similarly grilled tri-tip).

The flat, fibrous and well-marbled flap steak is often confused with skirt or flank. All three come from the bottom half of the animal, where the more active muscles/tougher cuts reside, but while skirt steak is taken from the plate section in the forequarter, and flank steak from the flank section in the hind-quarter, flap is in the bottom sirloin of the steer, the same region as the tri-tip. It's sometimes referred to as sirloin tips (which is actually a different cut) or bavette, the latter a nod to the French name for the cut—more correctly, *bavette d'aloiau*, or sirloin bib (as opposed to *bavette de flanchet*, or flank steak).

One of the biggest differences between the three is that, while flank and skirt are readily available from most butchers, flap is hard to find, especially in Chico. The brother-in-law who sang its praises discovered it at a Costco near his Maryland home, but when he came out here to visit last summer, a butcher on duty

at our local warehouse told us that it wasn't something they regularly carried.

It wasn't until a Costco trip earlier this month that I lucked upon "beef loin flap meat steak" (\$8.99/pound). The following week it was gone, only to return again last week. I've since heard different things from different Costco butchers—one who never had heard of the cut and one who said it usually comes out during grilling season.

At least our Costco sometimes carries it. I called other area butcher shops—Safeway's meat department, the Meats Lab at Chico State, the Butcher Shop at S&S Produce—and none of them stocks it. The only other place I could find that sold it was the carniceria inside Panadería la Michoacana (1414 Park Ave., Ste. 110). Butcher Sergio Alejandre Jr. says he sells flap steaks both plain and marinated under the name *arrachera* (a term more often used for skirt or flank steak that has been tenderized and marinated) for \$8.69/pound.

If you can get your hands on some, it's probably best prepared how you would any piece of beef for the grill—whether for carnitas or just a platter of sliced steak—using your favorite marinade and/or rub, cooking on high heat, and letting it rest 10 minutes before slicing. Personally, I'm such a fan of the flavor of the meat, I'm inclined to stick with salt as my only seasoning.

The most important variable to keep in mind is how you slice the cooked meat. Flap steak has very defined, loose fibers, and if you cut with the grain you'll be chewing on rubber bands. Slice against the grain, however, and the meat will melt in your mouth. □

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