

# Minnesota Grown Lamb

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It's beginning to feel like spring in Minnesota and many are preparing for their Easter and Passover holidays. While some opt for the popular Easter ham for their celebration, lamb is a traditional staple food for both holidays. We spoke with Bob Gatts of [Cookie & Vinny's Grass-fed Lamb](#) about how and they raise lamb.

Thinking about preparing lamb yourself this year? Whether you're a seasoned veteran or just considering the idea, we've provided classic cooking guidelines and some modern tips for creating a delicious and memorable meal for your holiday or any occasion.

You can find local Minnesota lamb from one of 36 farmers in the state! Check them out in the [Minnesota Grown Directory here.](#)

## *Cookie & Vinny's*

Bob Gatts and Kristen Blann own Cookie & Vinny's Grass-fed Lamb in Lincoln, Minnesota. They primarily raise and sell lamb; though that's not the only product Cookie & Vinny's offers. They also raise chickens for eggs and grow some produce like heirloom tomatoes, onions, squash, and lettuces in their gardens. They decided to name their business Cookie & Vinny's Grass-fed Lamb after their old stage names from a band they were in together. Bob is Vinny (a reference to the movie "My Cousin Vinny") and Kristen is Cookie. Their farming philosophy focuses on "earth responsible" land and resource management in an effort to make as little negative impact as possible. "We try to provide as much of our food as we can in an earth responsible manner. Any of our excess is offered for sale or trade to the community." Bob follows this philosophy in all aspects of his work; challenging himself to improvise and reuse things to reduce waste and use resources as efficiently as he can.

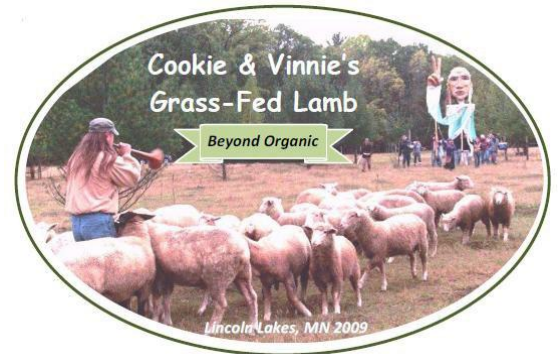
## *Meet the Farmers*



Bob Gatts and Kristen  
Blann  
from  
**Cookie & Vinny's  
Grass-fed Lamb**  
Lincoln, MN

This philosophy also ties into their animals' diets—choosing to raise grass-fed. Feeding their lambs and sheep grasses sourced from their own farm keeps their environmental impact low. In addition, their herds love to eat acorns and apples in the fall. This varied diet causes their animals to grow more slowly, but develops a leaner meat.

Cookie & Vinny's Grass-fed Lamb value their livestock beyond food sources. Their lamb, sheep, and chicken provide valuable manure that nourish their pastures and gardens, and help control noxious weeds like thistle. After the herd grazes parts of the pasture, those troublesome weeds are easier to spot and pull up. Lamb and sheep also produce warm wool fibers perfect for knitting and weaving. Bob and Kristen offer their raw wool for sale and have begun experimenting with spinning wool themselves.



Bob and Kristen are working to make lamb more accessible to their community by offering smaller cuts of meat and encouraging people to try grass-fed lamb for themselves. Typically, livestock producers will sell



whole, halves, or quarters of an animal to consumers, but Cookie & Vinny's have seen their smaller cuts make lamb more manageable for their regular customers, summer tourists visiting the area, those looking to try grass-fed lamb, and people without the freezer space for larger portions. To get more people sampling grass-fed lamb, Cookie & Vinny's Grass-fed Lamb hosts an annual Sheep Camp event where they invite the community to their farm and spit-roast their lamb over a wood fire for everyone to taste and enjoy. They've found many people who thought they didn't like lamb, enjoyed the grass-fed lamb they tasted or purchased at Cookie & Vinny's.

Bob's favorite cooking method is to spit-roast lamb over a wood fire after marinating it for 24 hours with wine, garlic, and spices. If you're new to lamb and aren't ready to jump right to spit-roasting, Bob suggests starting with ground lamb or roasts.

### ***Modern Alternatives to Mint Jelly***

Much like cranberries with turkey or lemon with fish, lamb and mint and a historic culinary pairing. The reasons behind this combination are not completely clear. Some historians believe it could simply be because lambs were born in the spring around the time mint was seasonally available. It was used as a garnish or made into a sauce. Ultimately, mint sauces evolved in the bright, almost neon green mint jelly that accompanied your grandma's lamb roast

Whether the memories of mint jelly make you cringe or fill you with nostalgia, American Lamb's website has some terrific ideas for minty alternatives. Try a recipe for mint pesto, mint-lemon marinade, or mint

chimichuri for a modern update to the classic lamb-mint pairing. To try something completely different, other great lamb couplings include lemon, spicy mustards, nuts and fresh herbs like rosemary, thyme, or oregano.

What will we do with all these leftovers?

No matter the effort we put into planning our holidays meals, there always seems to be an abundance of leftovers. Are you having post-Thanksgiving flashbacks to eating nothing but turkey sandwiches for weeks after the holiday? Some convenient and creative ways to add some variety to your leftovers are making gyros, stews, curries, or try adding it to salads or stir-fry!



Before you get started on planning your leftover recipes, it's important to know how to properly store your lamb to preserve its quality and flavor. Leftover lamb should be refrigerated at or below 40F. Stew and ground lamb will keep for about two days while chops and roasts can last up to five days in the refrigerator.



### ***How can I purchase lamb direct from a Minnesota Grown producer?***

- 1.) Make a connection with a local sheep producer near you that sells direct to their consumers. Visit the Minnesota Grown Directory online to find a producer based on town, zip code, or by browsing the map! Buying local meat offers a unique opportunity to build connections to both the farmer and processor.
- 2.) Next, decide on the amount of meat you are interested in. Some producers sell retail cuts directly from their farm or at a local farmers market, but each producer can be different in the way they handle orders. Other producers and processors market livestock as: whole animals, half, quarters, sides, or sometimes even smaller fractions of the animal.
- 3.) Chat with the local producer about their offerings. Each producer is unique, so don't be afraid to reach out and ask the producer what their quantity options are. It is important to be comfortable with your producer and processor of choice- go ahead and ask questions, this is the beauty of working one on one with your farmer.

- 4.) Bring home your locally raised lamb and enjoy!