

River Cottage Meat Book - Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

Contributed by jema

The River Cottage Meat book is a hefty and expensive tome, a chunky 544 pages, with a £25 price tag to match.

This sheer weight of the books might be enough to forewarn people that this book is not simply a lightweight celebrity product placement, aimed at extracting maximum cash from a TV series or three.

It is a whole lot more than that...
Introduction to the River Cottage Meat Book

The River Cottage Meat Book aims to make you think about the entire process of meat eating, from farm to slaughter house, to your dinner plate.

"I'd like to encourage you to think about the meat you eat. Is it good enough? Good enough to bring you pleasure every time you eat it? What about the animals it comes from? Have they lived well? and what about the way you cook meat? Are you adventurous with it? Are you thrifty with it? Do you respect it, and do it justice?"

Hugh starts the book off with a long philosophical discussion on the ethics of meat eating. You may not find yourself agreeing with all of his arguments, but he will force you to critically examine your view of eating meat. Understanding Meat

Hugh devotes a major section of the book to teaching how Beef, Lamb, Pork, Poultry and game get to our butchers or supermarket shelves. This is a no holds barred look at best and worst practice in the industry, and will be an education for almost anyone reading it. This section should change your meat buying practices forever.

As well as a polemic on the meat farming industry, there is a mass of useful information here as well. You will learn about the cuts of each animal, and what they are best used for, about jointing meat, about how meat should be hung to develop the best flavour.

There is also information of value to the smallholder raising their own animals and poultry, though I think they might prefer more specialised books. However these snippets provide a good insight for those thinking about starting on the "River Cottage Road". Cooking Meat

Having comprehensively covered meat before it hits the frying pan, Hugh takes the next step and covers the cooking and processing of meat.

Whether you want to cook the perfect roast, or cure your own Bacon, Hugh has something here for you. Including detailed instructions in the art of gravy making.

You will also be challenged, Hugh demonstrates his commitment to "Nose to Tail" eating with recipes for hearts, ears and trotters amongst other esoteric cuts of meat and offal.

If I have one criticism of this section of the book, it is that when promoting the more unusual crafts like curing and smoking, whilst I'm eternally grateful for him doing so, he is not really an expert. Try these crafts yourself and you will find the information in the meat book is pretty meagre and occasionally well off the ball. Conclusion

This is a book that will change your attitude to meat. At the same time it is far more than a polemic, it is a practical guide to all things meat. There are over 500 pages and this review has not touched on the information on buying meat, the resource listings of businesses offering organic meat, or useful supplies. As Hugh recommends "Nose to Tail" eating, I'd recommend cover to cover reading of this book.

For the thrifty whilst this book is worth every penny of its cover price of £25 it can be found much cheaper if you look around.

Buy this book as a christmas prezzie for anyone receptive to thinking about the ethics of our dinner table.

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