

Certified Organic Beef

WHAT IT IS

Organic food differs from conventionally produced food because it is grown, handled and processed according to stringent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations. Livestock products that are to be sold, labeled or represented as organic must be from livestock under continuous organic management.

Certified Organic Beef must meet USDA National Organic Program (NOP) standards. The Organic Food Production Act, effective October 2002, established USDA standards for food labeled organic. For cattle, these standards include:

Cattle must be fed 100 percent organic feed, but may be provided certain vitamin and mineral supplements.

Organically raised cattle may not be given hormones to promote growth or antibiotics for any reason. However, if an animal is sick, the animal cannot be denied treatment to ensure its health. Any animal that is treated with antibiotics is taken out of the NOP.

Although all cattle have access to pastures for most of their lives, the NOP also requires pasture access for cattle that are being Grain-Finished.

Information about the NOP is available at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

• Does Certified Organic Beef cost more?

Yes, generally speaking, organic beef does cost more. There is less of it, and it is harder to find in the marketplace. Less than one percent of all livestock and poultry raised in the United States is organic, according to the 2001 USDA census.

• Is Certified Organic Beef better for me?

Many people purchase Certified Organic Beef because of perceived health and nutrition benefits. However, there are no conclusive studies that determine Certified Organic Beef is healthier or safer than other types of beef. According to the American Council on Science and Health report, "The Role of Beef in the American Diet," published January 2003, organically produced food is no more safe or nutritious than conventionally-produced food.

• How do I know beef is organic?

Organic products carry the USDA Organic Seal which requires strict adherence to NOP standards for the production, handling and processing of organically grown agricultural products. The NOP details the methods, practices and substances that can be used in producing and handling organic crops and livestock. All agricultural products labeled organic must originate from farms or handling operations certified by a state or private agency accredited by USDA. However, farms and handling operations that sell less than \$5,000 worth per year of organic products are exempt from going through the USDA certification.

• **Is Certified Organic Beef Grass- or Grain-Finished?**

Both Grass-Finished and Grain-Finished Beef can qualify as organic if the producers meet the USDA regulations. Producing Certified Organic Beef has three phases. The first is cow-calf, which is the period from birth to weaning. The second phase is backgrounding, the period when the animal is weaned and begins to graze. During these two phases, cattle must be fed organically-grown pasture and hay. During the last phase, called the finishing phase, some farmers choose to add organically grown grain to the cattle's diet. Organically produced feed grain is created in certified organic mills. Organic farmers must maintain organic pasture for the cattle to graze on throughout all three production stages. (For a more complete list of organic management practices, see Recent Growth Patterns in the U.S. Organic Food Market by Carolyn Dimitri and Catherine Greene, USDA, Agriculture Information Bulletin Number 777, September, 2002. (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib777/>))

• **Is Certified Organic Beef processed separately from non-organic beef?**

Yes, all organically raised cattle must be raised separate from their conventional counterparts, and organically raised cattle are then processed in certified organic plants.

Sources for Purchasing Certified Organic Beef*

Certified Organic Beef can more likely be found in natural food stores such as Whole Foods or Wild Oats, both of which carry a Certified Organic Beef Brand of frozen beef cuts.

**Sources provided do not, in any way, reflect an endorsement by the Cattlemen's Beef Board or National Cattlemen's Beef Association. They are provided to you as a resource for additional information and in no way imply that they are all encompassing.*