

Conventional Beef

WHAT IT IS

It's the beef most of us are familiar with – the classic, fresh, USDA-graded beef in the supermarket meat case. The majority of Conventional Beef is Grain-Finished. Grain-Finished Beef cattle spend most of their lives in range or pasture conditions feeding on forage (grass). At 12 to 18 months of age, Grain-Finished cattle are moved to feed yards where they receive a carefully balanced diet. This feeding period typically lasts between 120 and 200 days.

Corn is the chief ingredient in cattle feed for Grain-Finished Beef cattle. Feed corn (not suitable for human consumption) is grown in abundance in the U.S. and provides a feed source for cattle year-round. Grain-finishing beef assures a year-round supply of high quality beef and helps keep consumer prices down. In addition, corn feeding creates tender beef with the rich flavor most consumers prefer.

Conventional Beef also is Natural Beef. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines Natural Beef as “minimally processed containing no additives.” All fresh beef found in the meat case that does not have an ingredient label (a label is added if the product includes a marinade or solution) is Natural Beef.

Some manufacturers use the term “natural” for marketing purposes. To determine exactly what a manufacturer means by the use of the term natural in these situations, consumers should read the product label or contact the manufacturer.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

• **How much beef is sold as Conventional Beef?**

According to Cattle-FAX, a cattle marketing information service, about 85 percent of all U.S. beef is Grain-Finished.

• **Does grain create digestive or health challenges for cattle?**

All ranchers care about the health of their cattle and provide the animals with the nutrients they need to grow and be healthy. Cattle feed is specially designed to meet the nutrition needs of cattle. There are at least 17 minerals that beef cattle need in their diet, most of which can be found in forage. Vitamin and mineral supplements are used for Grain-Finished Beef as well as Grass-Finished Beef cattle to ensure that nutritional needs are met.

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Conventional Beef – add 1

- **Are antibiotics and hormones used in Conventional Beef?**

Yes, they are judiciously used. Antibiotics are primarily used to treat, control and prevent disease. Growth promoting products are approved by the Food and Drug Administration based upon rigorous testing procedures similar to those used for human drugs.

- **Is there a difference in taste between Conventional Beef and other types of beef?**

The analysis of existing flavor panel studies show consumers prefer the overall flavor of Conventional (or Grain-Finished) Beef when compared to Grass-Finished Beef. This study analysis can be found at: <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/beef/mp80.pdf>, on page 74.

- **Is Conventional Beef more likely to be safe?**

There is no safety difference in beef due to different production methods. No matter the type of production, U.S. beef is among the safest beef in the world thanks to adherence to sound science, strong government regulations and enforcement, and diligence on the part of beef producers. America's beef producers have been leaders in developing and validating a majority of the safety interventions currently in place throughout the beef chain.

Sources for Purchasing Conventional Beef

The fresh beef in the meat case of most supermarkets is Conventional Beef. However, Grain-Finished Beef is not specified on the meat label. If you are specifically looking for Grain-Finished Beef, ask the store meat manager for clarification.