

Grass-Finished Beef

WHAT IT IS

Grass-Finished Beef comes from animals that have been pasture-fed throughout their lives. By far, the majority of Grass-Finished Beef marketed in the U.S. is imported from Australia and New Zealand where grass is in greater abundance than feed corn and can be grown year-round. The beef industries in these two countries are considerably smaller than the U.S. beef industry. A small number of producers in North America finish cattle on grass in areas of the country where the growing season makes this possible.

Grass-Finished Beef is not necessarily Certified Organic Beef. (See Certified Organic Beef fact sheet for definition of organic beef.) Grass-Finished cattle may be given FDA-approved antibiotics and/or hormones. The Grass-Finished Beef market aims to satisfy consumers who prefer the concept of cattle grazing through the final stage of production.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

• Is Grass-Finished Beef leaner than Grain-Finished?

The question of Grass-Finished versus Grain-Finished Beef usually centers around flavor and not how lean the beef is. There are 29 cuts of beef that meet the government labeling guidelines for lean, including some of Americans' traditional favorites like flank steak, tenderloin, 95% lean ground beef and T-bone steak, as well as newer cuts of beef, such as Western Griller steak and Ranch steak. Grass-Finished Beef tends to grade "Select" (slight intramuscular fat marbling), giving it the same lean profile as Conventional Beef graded "Select."

• Is Grass-Finished Beef more nutritious than Conventional Beef?

All beef is a good source of essential nutrients. There is some discussion over Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA) and omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids in Grass-Finished Beef. All types of beef contain CLA which, research indicates, has cancer-fighting properties. Grass-Finished Beef, on average, can contain as much as double the amount of CLA that is found in other types of beef. However, research has not yet shown how much CLA in the diet is optimal to achieve health benefits. In addition, a 3.5 ounce serving of Grass-Finished Beef offers 15 milligrams (less than one tenth of a gram) more omega-3 than the same serving of Grain-Finished or Conventional Beef. Beef, however, is not a primary source of omega-3 fatty acids.

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- **Is grass finishing more environmentally friendly?**

Raising cattle for any type of beef product presents environmental benefits and challenges. It is often incorrectly stated that Grass-Finished Beef is more beneficial to the environment. While properly managed grazing can produce healthy grasslands, forage-consuming steers produce more waste than Grain-Finished steers. Waste from all cattle can be beneficial when appropriately managed and applied to the land as fertilizer.

- **Does Grass-Finished Beef taste different?**

Many people may not be familiar with the taste of Grass-Finished Beef since it is only a small percentage of beef production. Grass-Finished Beef has a distinctively different taste, sometimes described as a taste like game meat. Research conducted at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in 2003 concluded that Grass-Finished cattle produce beef that is less tender than beef from Grain-Finished cattle. In addition, the analysis of existing flavor panel studies also show the overall flavor of Grain-Finished Beef as more desirable to consumers than Grass-Finished. (<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/beef/mp80.pdf>, on page 74)

- **Is Grass-Finished Beef safer than Grain-Finished Beef?**

There is no safety difference in beef due to different production methods. No matter the type of production, U.S. beef remains the safest in the world thanks to adherence to sound science, strong government regulations and enforcement, and diligence on the part of beef producers. A United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) study of range beef calves showed that exposure to *E.coli* 0157:H7 is prevalent in range cattle and is not a function of the feed yard environments.

Sources for Purchasing Grass-Finished Beef

Grass-Finished Beef is not required to be labeled. For specific information, ask the store meat manager.