

WHY IS "GRASS-FED" SO IMPORTANT?

Pigs and chickens are omnivores, meaning they can eat all kinds of foodstuffs including the protein of other animals, but cows and sheep are ruminants, meaning their digestive systems are exclusively designed for a plant diet. As you can read in our FAQs under "What does 'grass fed' really mean?" many beef producers refer to and market their meat as "grass fed" simply because their cows ate grass at one time in their lives; they still raise or finish their cattle on grain for weeks or months, significantly changing the taste, texture and nutritional profile of the beef as the cows' bodies convert grain into sugar and sugar into less-digestible and less-healthy fat. We do not do this; our cows eat their natural diet of grass, clover and varied plant life every day for their entire lives, thus ensuring the meat is as nutrient-dense and as digestible as possible.

A FEW BENEFITS OF EATING EXCLUSIVELY GRASS FED BEEF

CLA

Beef from grass-fed cows tends to contain substantial amounts of a fatty acid called CLA (conjugated linoleic acid). Some grass-fed beef has actually been shown to contain roughly *twice* the CLA of beef from some grain-fed cows. CLA is considered to be one of the more important anti-cancer nutrients and substantial evidence indicates lowered cancer risk with high-CLA diets. CLA also appears to help prevent conditions like obesity and diabetes. Clinically rigorous studies suggest that many people with more CLA in their diets demonstrate better insulin sensitivity than those with less CLA. CLA may play a role in preventing elevated blood glucose levels, which signal the release of insulin (and can eventually lead to insulin resistance, a precursor to diabetes).

Omega 3s

Grass-fed beef has been shown over and over to provide far more omega-3 fatty acids than grain-fed beef. Grain-fed beef, on the other hand, contains higher levels of omega-6 fatty acids, which are already eaten in surplus in most standard American diets and appear to displace omega-3s in the body and brain when disproportionately consumed.

Disease Prevention

As noted, clinical evidence suggests a decreased risk of heart disease with an increased consumption of CLA; other strongly indicated benefits include high levels of antioxidants such as vitamin E and a far

better ratio of HDL – high-density lipoprotein to LDL – low-density lipoprotein. HDL is known as “good cholesterol” because it contributes to the body’s effective processing of fats and nutrients, but LDL cholesterol inhibits vascular health and is often a marker of cardiac disease. Grain-fed and processed meat-heavy diets are classic contributors to high levels of LDL.

Electrolytes

Often, electrolytes aren’t replenished after they’re flushed from our bodies and carbohydrates (like those that feature heavily in most of our diets) tend to increase insulin in the bloodstream, signaling the kidneys to dump electrolytes. These electrolytes – especially sodium, potassium, and magnesium – are key to a number of chemical and anatomical functions and should be well-supplied in the body. Fortunately, grass-fed meat has been demonstrated to contain ample amounts of all three essential electrolytes at far higher levels than meat fed a grain diet.

WHY ALL “GRASS-FED” BEEF IS NOT THE SAME

Unfortunately, even beef labeled “100% grass-fed” is not all created equal. Many beef farmers who eliminate grain from their animals’ diets still continue to contain or pen their animals some or all of the time, bringing hay or baling to them in containment, thus fulfilling the technical definition of grass-feeding but depriving their animals of the sunlight, diet and exercise that make them as robustly healthy and as delicious as they can be. This is essentially substituting the grain for grass in a CAFO model, and it is, in fact, the most common kind of exclusively grass-fed beef.

Additionally, producers often process grass-fed animals as soon as possible, at two years of age or less, meaning the intramuscular fat content (marbling) is underdeveloped and the meat is extremely lean. Indeed, many people believe grass-fed beef is “naturally leaner” than grain fed beef, when in fact the faster you can grow and slaughter a cow, the sooner you can profit from it, meaning it is in farmers’ interests to do so early. Grain feeding fattens the animal prematurely so that it can be slaughtered as early as 20 months. Some grass-fed producers follow this model and slaughter their animals quickly too, but if the animal has not been eating grain it will be extremely lean at this stage of life. Fat concentration and distribution in a grass-fed animal is a function of age and diet; the older the animal is and the longer and better it has grazed, the more likely it is to be well-marbled and the better and more complex the

meat is likely to taste. But this takes time and cuts into profits, so most producers don't wait, increasing the amount of "100% grass-fed beef" that is prematurely processed. This is one of the primary reasons most folks associate grass-fed beef with "leanness" and "toughness".

Although leanness is idealized by the food industry, the simple truth is that the benefits of "lean meat" only apply when considering the inherently toxic fat produced by degraded animal lifestyles and concentrated feeding operations. As the information above shows, fat in exclusively grass-fed animals is where the omega three fatty acids and good cholesterol that our bodies thrive on are stored. As a result, the older and better exercised a grass-fed animal is, the more fat it will have, the more marbled it will be, the more nutrient dense and healthy it will become for the eater.

At Grazin', we leave every single cow on our farm on pasture for every moment of their lives, which are 36 months (or more) without exception. Some of our cows are as old as five years, all of it spent out under the sun and in the weather on varied pastureland. These practices result in a flavor profile, fat content and nutritional concentration that is singular even among grass-fed animals.

HOW THE GREENHOUSE GAS PRODUCTION AND CARBON EXPRESSION OF GRASS FEEDERS CONTRASTS WITH MAJOR PRODUCERS

Since the contributions that CAFO beef producers make to climate change through the emission of vast quantities of greenhouse gasses (primarily carbon and methane) has become clear, there has been more and more discussion about the emissions measurements and the net carbon footprints of grass-fed beef operations. We view these discussions as welcome and important, but it is our educated opinion that it is very hard to quantify the issue because of the variance in the quality, size, approach and techniques of the thousands of so-called "grass-fed" beef producers, even eliminating all except those who practice "100% Grass" feeding methods. The fact is that no contained animal operation, regardless of particulars, can be realistically measured against a pasture-exclusive farm. This is because the *actual practice of*

feeding animals directly from varied pasture is likely what can change cattle farming's impact on climate change from a profound negative to a net positive.

Ruminant animals can stimulate significant new plant growth through grazing, thus enabling what is known as “carbon sequestration”, the storing of free environmental carbon that occurs as new plants capture it for enhanced energy metabolism. Simply put, there is not likely to be carbon sequestration or any positive impacts from a farm that pens its animals for the majority of the time, regardless of what the animals eat when penned.

Since sequestration correlates directly to active grazing, its success necessarily depends on the health and abundance of the pasture/grazing land, the techniques of rotation and integration with other animals, the climate, the water table, and the time and the knowledge to bring it all together correctly – yet again, even among pasture-centered farms, not all are created or operated equal, so they may not maximize sequestration or achieve it at consistent levels. It takes significant space, experience, and care to regenerate and develop pasture land through rotational grazing and our farm may be in the minority in terms of the level of time and attention we devote to this goal. It has been said that feeding animals exclusively on grass through true rotational grazing and without penning is really “grass farming”, and this is essentially a true statement; to raise cattle this way, the access to new and healthy pasture must be abundant and the management of that pasture must be constant and discerning. Hay must be cut and stored the right way at the right time. Cattle must be moved strategically to maximize the symbiotic benefits grazing can offer both land and animal and there must be an assortment of grazing conditions to meet the demand of the herd. Overgrazing or mismanagement can compromise sustainability. We succeed in pasturing our animals this way because we are fortunate enough to have the right conditions and the years of experience; we believe our farm does sequester carbon and is a net negative for many emissions, but these questions require further exploration and research, and there is so much variation among producers that reaching a consensus is difficult, if not impossible.

For more discussion of the nutritional value of Grass-Fed vs. Grain-Fed beef, read [NUTRITIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GRASS AND GRAIN FED BEEF](#) By Loren Cordain, Ph.D.