Grass-Fed Versus Grain-Fed: Why it Matters

What the animal ate is important

Beef quality and nutritional value is determined by the health of the cow

Does it really matter if a cow was pasture-raised and ate grass for the majority of its life? Isn't all beef the same? The simple answer: No. Let's take a deep dive into the difference in quality between grass-finished and grain-fed beef.

Grass-fed beef has a higher proportion of omega-3 fatty acids compared to grain-fed beef. Omega-3 fatty acids are beneficial for heart health, and a balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids prevents inflammation. Grain-fed beef is much higher in omega-6 fatty acids (promoting inflammation). Grass-fed beef contains higher levels of certain antioxidants, such as vitamin E and

beta-carotene. Polyphenols (an antioxidant often believed to only be found in plant foods) are also available in grass–fed beef.

Grass-fed beef is higher in conjugated linoleic acid (CLA). This is a type of fatty acid that is associated with various health benefits, including reduced body fat and improved metabolic health. Conventional grain-fed beef is treated with hormones and antibiotics. This does impact the safety and quality of the meat. The vast majority of grass-fed beef comes from cows treated without antibiotics or hormones. Plus, a lot of grass-fed beef is from an organic source (which means that none of the cows grazed on land sprayed with pesticides).

Grass-fed beef, especially from farmers practicing regenerative agriculture, is sustainable and is beneficial for the environment. Despite what the media tells you, livestock and animal husbandry are critical to our ecosystem. Cattle raised on regenerative farmland replenish the soil with their manure. Natural sunlight and rainfall create farmland that are perfect for growing produce. Conventional farming does not replenish the soil. You will not find grain-fed cows on a farm with traditional agriculture practices.

Regenerative farm (left) compared to a conventional farm (right)