



Chewing the cud on grass-fed beef

We keep hearing good things about grass-fed beef. Is it really that much better for you?

There's a compelling body of research showing that the ratio of heart-healthy fats in grass-fed beef is significantly higher than in grain-fed beef. So that's good. But the benefits aren't strong enough for health professionals to issue a general recommendation to choose grass-fed beef over other options.

Most people link beef with saturated fat, but all beef actually has a mixture of different types of fats, including heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and even omega-3 fatty acids, which have been long touted for their health effects. Also present is a type of fat called conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which some studies have linked with health benefits including assisting in weight-loss efforts. An article in a recent issue of the *Nutrition Journal* reviewed research over the last 30 years comparing grass-fed and grain-fed beef, and found that grass-fed beef had less overall fat and calories, more omega-3 fatty acids, less cholesterol, more vitamin A and E, and about twice the level of CLA than grain-fed beef.

However, the research also noted that grass-fed beef can have a distinct "grassy" flavor. While grass-fed beef enthusiasts like the flavor, the study noted that trained sensory panels found grass-fed beef "less palatable than grain-fed beef in flavor and tenderness." They also suggest that

consumers can get just as much of the omega-3 fatty acids and CLA they would get from grass-fed beef by eating higher-fat cuts of grain-fed beef. Of course, that means they'd be consuming more saturated fat as well, so it's hard to say how much of a benefit that would be. And, it should be noted that the amount of omega-3 fatty acids in either type of beef is far outshined by the amount found in salmon and other fatty types of fish — often at a lower cost than the premium-priced grass-fed beef.

Still, many consumers prefer grass-fed beef not simply because of its healthier nutrition profile, but because of animal welfare and environmental concerns.

If you're interested in grass-fed beef, look on the label for "USDA Process Certified." Grass-fed products with that label adhere to U.S. Department of Agriculture standards that require a 100 percent forage-based diet, except for incidental supplementation that might be needed to ensure the animal's health during extreme environmental or physical conditions. The American Grassfed Association has its own seal for products that meet its more rigorous standards. For details on that, see the association's Web site, <http://www.americangrassfed.org>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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