

Grass-Fed vs. Grain Fed Cattle

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Food Quality and Considerations of Healthful Meat Products

- Dr. Stephen Smith, meat scientist at Texas A&M: “We looked at the scientific literature and could not find any justifications for the statement that pasture-fed beef is better for you.”
- Dr. Smith and a team of researchers conducted a study to see: “if product from pasture-fed and corn-fed cattle had different effects on LDL and HDL cholesterol.”
- Consumption of meat from grain-fed cattle showed:
 - Increased HDL cholesterol w/ meat from grain fed cattle
 - Increased LDL particle diameter
 - Decreased insulin
- Study found statistically significant heart health benefits from high monounsaturated fat ground beef **from grain-fed cattle**, but no heart health benefit found from grass-fed cattle.

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Food Quality and Healthiness Considerations

- The literature is full of competing and inconclusive studies and reports comparing the healthiness of grass vs. grain fed beef.
- In the end, a preference for meat from grass-fed or grain-fed cattle is a personal choice.
- Today's market choice is clear: 95% of meat in the U.S. marketplace comes from grain-fed cattle!

Although it is not clear that one source of beef is healthier than the other, it is entirely clear that attempting to supply the existing market from pasture fed beef will result in increases in market costs, pricing many consumers out of the market for beef products.

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The Traditional Picture: Not All it Seems

- Feeding cattle on pasture may be a good way to feed some cattle, but it doesn't address either the fundamental economic or basic environmental problem of animal production.
- Economic problem:
 - Grazing cattle is not capable of actually feeding large numbers of people at a price they can afford (the reality of 95%).
 - Feeding cattle on pasture doesn't answer the need to feed America's 300 million people let alone meet export demand for beef products.
- Environmental
 - Despite a benign appearance, small, pasture-based animal facilities produce the same quantity of pollutants to both air and water on a per head basis as large grain-based animal production facilities assuming similar practices;
 - But without the resources to capture, control or treat those pollutants!

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Environmental Considerations Based on Measurable Impacts

- Low inputs (grass-fed) do not translate into low outputs or sustainable impacts!
- Cattle fed conventional corn diets increase growth rates and reduce days on feed compared to cattle on grass-only diets, reducing environmental impacts on a per head basis as a direct result!
- Based on a study conducted by Dr. Jude Capper, Assistant Professor of Animal Science at Washington State University: “to produce the same amount of beef from steers raised to market weight, on pasture cattle production requires:
 - 2.5 times more energy
 - 12.6 times more land use, and
 - Results in 2.8 times more methane emissions.”

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Additional Environmental Considerations

- “Without modern beef production technologies (including grain based diets) an additional 165 million acres of grazing lands would be required in order to maintain today’s beef production levels.”
(from a report authored by Thomas Elam, PhD, President of Strategic Directions and Rodney Preston, PhD, Thornton Professor Emeritus, Texas Tech University.)
- “To feed an additional 2.3 billion people, global food production must increase by 70% by 2050, an objective that relies almost entirely on technological advances to increase production capacity.” (analysis by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization)

In the end, “grass vs. grain” is not a legal, market or business issue, it is a personal issue that Bion cannot directly address.