

THE ADVANTAGES OF PASTURE-RAISED FOODS

Reprinted from *The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook: Healthy Cooking and Good Living with Pasture-Raised Foods*, by Shannon Hayes (Eating Fresh Publications, 2004)

What are the advantages of eating meat from animals raised on grass? Take your pick. Grass-fed meats come with a rich assortment of health, environmental, social, and economic benefits:

- *Health benefits.* Jo Robinson, in her landmark book *Why Grassfed Is Best!*, uncovers the growing body of research supporting the notable health benefits of grass-fed meats. In addition to being lower in fat and calories than grain-fed meats, grass-fed meats are rich in “good fats”—notably, omega-3 fatty acids, which are linked to blood pressure reduction, healthy brain function, and the slowed growth of many types of cancer. In addition, grass-fed meats and dairy products are a rich source of conjugated linoleic acids, or CLAs, another “good fat,” which, according to Robinson, “may be one of our most potent defenses against cancer.” Beyond that, these meats are known to contain antioxidant vitamins and are much less likely to carry the virulent strain of *E. coli* 0157:H7. A 1998 study in *Science* magazine reported an *E. coli* count of 6,300,000 cells per gram of meat in grain-fed animals versus 20,000 cells per gram in grass-fed meat.¹ Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the *E. coli* found in grass-fed meat is much less likely to survive our first line of defense—our stomach acids. Although *E. coli* is typically unable to survive ruminant stomach acids, a cow whose diet is unnaturally high in grains generally has a higher level of acidity in its digestive tract. Thus, any *E. coli* that develops easily acclimates to the acid environment and can therefore survive human stomach acids. The very few *E. coli* cells found in grass-fed

cattle have not become acclimated to an acid environment and so are less likely to survive in our own systems.²

- *Environmental benefits.* The pasturing of animals encourages biodiversity, improves soil fertility, and eliminates the waste-management problems associated with confinement-feeding operations. Feeding animals on grass reduces greenhouse gases in the air due to a process called carbon sequestration, wherein the grasses and legumes found in well-managed pastures are able to draw excess carbon dioxide from the air and return it to the soil as carbon. Most important, buying pasture-raised products from a farmer in your area helps keep the farm in business. The more commercially viable your local and regional farms are, the more likely it is that they will continue as farms and that the land will not be turned into housing subdivisions, shopping malls, and parking lots. If you live in an area that is rapidly losing open space, consider that there are few better uses of wide-open spaces than small-scale family farms. They enhance the landscape, provide a local food source, and make good use of the land they occupy.
- *Social benefits.* Purchasing grass-fed meats and dairy products has a dramatic impact on animal as well as human welfare. Animals raised on lush, green pasture experience significantly less stress over the course of their lives than their factory-raised counterparts. They're not overcrowded, they're able to get exercise, and they can act on their natural instincts—moving to shade in the heat of the day, eating when they're hungry, or even playing with each other. Because pastured animals frequently move to new grass, they enjoy clean and spacious environments and are less likely than are confined animals to become ill or to contract an array of diseases. In addition, farmers working on grass-based operations enjoy a healthier work environment than those who work on large-scale factory farms. They are less likely to suffer from respiratory problems resulting from the dust, ammonia, and dangerously high levels of carbon dioxide so common in confinement facilities.³
- *Economic benefits.* Although grass-based farms are more labor-intensive, farm inputs, such as fossil fuels, are kept to a minimum, thus significantly reducing farmers' expenses. Furthermore, farmers are able to get a fair price for their product when they sell to informed, socially responsible consumers who are willing to pay the true

cost of their food rather than relying on artificial price supports for the grain used to produce conventionally raised meat. This means that farm families can enjoy a fair return for their labor. Small-scale family farms—such as many pasture-based farms—that are locally owned and operated contribute in numerous ways to a community. They hire local workers, contract with local service providers, purchase local goods, and participate in local activities. Unlike most other types of businesses, farms are unlikely to pull up roots and move somewhere else. They are invested in the community.

Your decision to purchase grass-fed foods is an important one. The production of grass-fed meats and dairy products helps heal our environment, it ensures the welfare of the livestock, and it enables farmers to realize better working conditions and a fair income. And grass-fed meats are healthier. But the benefits don't stop there. Grass-fed meats and dairy products taste better than their conventionally raised counterparts. Grass-fed pork and lamb have a particularly rich and savory flavor. Grass-fed beef tends to be lean and juicy, with a rich, robust flavor. Pasture-raised chickens have a firm texture and the type of flavor that older generations remember from their youth. Once you've experienced these superior foods, you'll never want to purchase conventionally raised meat or dairy products again.

To order a copy of *The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook*, call 877-410-2749 or see www.eatingfresh.com.