

GOOD MEAT, BAD MEAT

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I recently attended a grass-fed beef and wine tasting event, a strange thing for me to do because I haven't eaten beef since I was 12 years old. It was held on a serene wooded hilltop of Napa Valley at the [Long Meadow Ranch](#), a family owned operation dedicated to producing sustainable, organic grapes, grass-fed beef, eggs, olives and produce.

I stopped eating beef years ago for health and animal welfare reasons and, despite changing my beliefs around meat, I haven't taken a bite since. Until this tasting. Over the years, my views around meat have changed; I have witnessed dramatic improvements in the health and vitality of many of my clients when they switch from vegetarian diets to a regular intake of good quality meat. Research tells us grass-fed meat possesses heart-healthy, cancer-blocking, fat-burning nutrients. When animals are raised in a humane way and allowed to roam on grass as they have for thousands of years, to live free of crowded feedlots, and to mature without drugs, I feel good about supporting the ranchers who care about the welfare of their animals and the health of fellow humans.

My clients are often puzzled by the conflicting reports on beef: "Meat is bad for us." Vs. "Meat is good for us." Both views may be right. Meat may be beneficial, *or* detrimental to your health, depending on the source of the meat and your [constitutional type](#). When meat - be it beef, veal, venison, lamb, bison or wild game - comes from a "finish grass-fed" source, it is a low-fat food rich in healing nutrients and high quality protein. Real grass-fed, *or finish grass-fed* meat comes from animals that live on green pasture right up until slaughter and not switched over to grains or corn for fattening and profit purposes.

Feedlot supermarket meats, on the other hand, come from cows raised in confinement. Their meats are likely to be contaminated with hormones, antibiotics and drug-resistant bacteria. The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal in 2003 recommended choosing organic and grass-fed meats for such safety reasons. Virulent strains of bacteria thrive in the highly acidic digestive systems of corn and grain-eating confined cattle. These toxic microorganisms decrease dramatically in the digestive systems of grass-fed animals (*Microbes Infect* 2000 Jan;2(1):45-53. Mad cow disease is also suspected to arise from feedlots, where cows are fed animal byproducts.

Beyond the quality of your meat source, your [constitution](#) dictates the healthfulness of a more meat-centered diet verses a plant-based diet. Some of my clients thrive on diets rich in meats and non-starchy plant foods. Others suffer digestive problems and flagging energy levels when they consume much meat or other animal protein. Meat is a *warming*, yang food, as opposed to vegetables, which

are more *cooling* and yin. Understanding your yin-yang constitution, and of course, how you feel after eating a food, are important in determining your best choice of foods, including meat. Refer to my book [Live in the Balance](#) or see [Yin Yang Balance and Food Choice](#) for more on making your own best food choices.

Dangers and Impact of Feedlot Meat

Since corn is one of the cheapest foods that can keep a cow alive, this is the most common feed for factory-raised cattle. Corn can be supplemented with other grains, wrapped candy, bubble gum, chicken feathers and other animal parts, stale pizza crust and, in 2002 over 200,000 tons of Los Angeles municipal waste (www.eatwild.com). I can only imagine how municipal waste or candy specifically impacts a cow's well being, but corn creates some big problems for animals designed to eat grass. Corn creates enough gas in a cow's rumen for them to suffocate from the expanding effects of their last meal. Furthermore corn, like other grains, creates a highly acidic digestion, one that promotes infection and the growth of dangerous acid-resistant bacteria, including super-virulent E. coli.

Current feedlot practices necessitate the use of massive quantities of antibiotics, both for growth and to fight infections. "The only way you can keep cows alive is with antibiotics," says Michael Pollen, best selling author of *The Botany of Desire* and the *Omnivore's Dilemma*. This is creating an epidemic of antibiotic-resistant bacteria as organisms evolve to survive drugs.

What this means for you is that the next time your child has a respiratory infection, the antibiotic your doctor hands you may not work. Even worse, the supermarket hamburgers you serve your family may poison them. Every factory steak you eat transfers drug-resistant bacteria to your stomach. The super-bug, E. coli 0157:H7, found in meat and crops exposed to contaminated feedlot run-off, sickens over 70,000 per year and kills 60 people, according to the CDC.

Another safety issue with grain-fed meat is hormone-use, which makes cows fat faster for greater profits. Almost all American beef cattle are implanted with hormones. Just like with antibiotics, residues of hormones end up in meat. Such hormones are a suspected contributor to breast cancer as well a cause of early puberty seen so often in young girls these days and the abnormal breast development seen in young boys. This is not an issue researchers are being paid to study. Hormones bring us a steady supply of cheap meat, something Americans demand and nearly impossible if hormones are not allowed.

Feedlot beef is also harmful to the environment. Corn-feeding animals requires use of large amounts of fossil fuels for production of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. With fertilizer use comes pollution, destruction of soils, and more petroleum use.

Grass-fed Benefits for You

Grass-fed meats are free of these hazards and environmental impacts. Grass-fed beef is also lower in overall fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and calories than meats from corn and grain fed animals. Grass-fed beef contains about the same amount of fat as a skinless chicken breast yet it is two to six times richer in healing omega-3 fats and lower in omega-6 fat than commercial meats, a combination that protects against heart disease and cancer, prevents Alzheimer's disease, reduces arthritis, and helps burn fat.

The ideal ratio of omega 6: omega 3 fats enjoyed in the human diet for thousands of years is around 2:1. Our modern diet delivers omega ratios of 10:1 to 25:1, or even higher, a risky experiment. This excess omega-6 is largely from vegetable oils but also from feedlot meats. Corn-fed beef offers up an omega 6:3 ratio of 20:1, whereas grass-fed delivers a highly beneficial .16:1, a ratio that can help bring an overall balance of fatty acids into our imbalanced diet. (*Jr Animal Sci*, 2000;78:2849-2855)

Grass-fed meats are also richer than feedlot meats in CLA (conjugated linoleic acid), a unique fat that protects against many forms of cancer, burns excess fat, and may reduce artery plaque. A study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* (Dec. 2000) reports taking 3.4 grams CLA enabled study participants to drop six pounds of body fat while increasing muscle mass. A French study of 360 women found those with the highest levels of CLA in their tissue had a 74 percent reduction in breast cancer risk (*Inform*, 1999;10:5:S43). A researcher with the Dairy Forage Research Center in Wisconsin found grazing cows have hundreds of times more CLA in their tissues than do corn-fed cows.

Grass-fed meat is richer in selenium, a mineral that fights cancer, balances mood, and boosts immunity. Grass-fed bison has four times more selenium than grain-fed. Eating three ounces of bison can give you enough selenium to significantly improve your mood. Grass-eating cows produce beef with three to four times more heart-protective vitamin E than feedlot beef. Grass is rich in this age-fighting nutrient. Japanese consumers discovered American corn-fed beef spoiled more quickly than grass-fed Australian beef. Grass-fed beef is naturally preserved by the rich vitamin E content passed on from a diet of live plants. The beta-carotene content of grass is also passed on to grass-fed meats.

Grass-Fed Meat Flavor

The freshly cooked meatball I savored at Long Meadow Ranch was juicy and flavorful yet lean and lacking that greasy quality I remember from ground meat from my childhood. As with wine or cheese, grass-fed meats vary in flavor and even nutrients according to the region. Grass-fed beef from a good breed and properly managed, is a naturally lean, tender and flavorful meat. Argentina beef, considered among the best in the world, is grass-fed. Many celebrated chefs and Michelin rated restaurants, including Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, regularly feature grass-fed beef on their menus.

Corn/grain-fed beef is a factory product and thus is more predictable in its flavor and texture than grass-fed. Many Americans have grown accustomed to the marbled quality and texture of corn-fed

meat. Familiarity with a food often determines our preferences. It works both ways: I once counseled an elderly male client who commented the grass-fed beef I advised him to purchase tasted delicious and reminded him of the beef he had as a boy (which was grass-fed at that time).

Proper cooking is big key to bringing out the excellent flavor and texture possible with grass-fed meat, and is far more important than for cooking corn-fed meats. Grass-fed meat takes roughly 30 percent less time to cook than corn-fed and often does best with a lower temperature. Steaks however, are tasty when seared briefly over high heat on each side to seal in juices, then drizzled with melted butter. Roasts can be cooked in a liquid or sauce for a tender, rich-flavored product. Overcooking is the biggest mistake. For more ideas, check out <http://www.grassfedcooking.com/>

Shopping for Grass-Fed Meats

Grass-fed meat is more difficult to find and more expensive than standard supermarket meat, but it's beginning to take hold. Ask your butcher for it. Grass-fed meat, like watermelon, is seasonal. It is available fresh in late spring or early summer. Stocking up at these times and freezing it gives you a supply of high quality meat in the off-season.

I am often directed to “natural” or “organic beef” in the butcher section of my Whole Foods or other markets when I ask for “grass fed.” Be careful, these are not equal. The key question to get answered is whether the meat is “finish grass fed”. Cows may be fed organic corn or grains, especially toward the end for fattening purposes. This leaves meat hormone-free and probably antibiotic-free, but the resulting meat contains distorted fatty acid ratios and many of the other problems described above.

We can not sustain our health or the health of our soils with corn and grain-fed meats. We are paying too high a price in human health, animal health and welfare, soil and environmental destruction, and medical problems. Make a contribution to your family's health and that of the nation's farmlands and animals with your shopping dollar. Buy grass-fed.

To learn more about cooking grass-fed meats see: <http://www.grassfedcooking.com/>

For sources of grass-fed and/or hormone-free, antibiotic-free meats see: [Shopping for Sustainable, Grass-Fed Meats](#)

Questions for your butcher: _

1. Is this meat from cows that remained on pasture to the end? _
2. Is this meat finished on grass/pasture? On grain? In a feedlot? _
3. Have these animals been fed any corn, grains, soy or anything else? _
4. Have the animals been treated with any antibiotics, steroids or hormones?