

# The Nutritional Benefits of Pasture-Raised Food

## Animals on pasture = more nutritious meat, milk and eggs

Most food-producing animals today are confined inside for part or all of their lives. They are often fed an unnatural diet high in grains. Animals that are raised outdoors on well-managed pasture eat a diverse diet of plants. They are also exposed to sunshine and are able to exercise. This results in healthier animals ... and more nutritious food for people as well.



**Studies show that food from pasture-raised animals has a higher nutritional value when compared to food from animals that were fed grain and raised in confinement.**

### Less saturated fat, more polyunsaturated fat

- ▶ Pasture-raised beef, dairy, bison, poultry, lamb, goat meat, pork and eggs contain less saturated fat and more heart healthy polyunsaturated fat. Replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats is associated with reduced blood levels of total and LDL cholesterol, which can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

### Lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 polyunsaturated fats

- ▶ Pasture-raised beef, dairy, bison, poultry, lamb, goat meat, pork and eggs have a lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 polyunsaturated fats. Omega-6 fats are more inflammatory than omega-3 fats. Research suggests that a lower ratio in the diet may improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer.
- ▶ Pasture-raised beef, bison, poultry, lamb, and goat meat have increased levels of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids that may improve neural health. Grass-fed dairy products have an increased amount of conjugated linoleic acid, which has shown efficacy against cancer and obesity.

### Higher levels of vitamins and nutrients

- ▶ **More antioxidants:** Pasture-raised beef, dairy, lamb, goat meat, poultry, pork and eggs have higher levels of **vitamin E**. Eggs, beef, dairy, and bison meat contain more **β-carotene**. Bison meat contains more **niacin**. These antioxidants protect cells from damage due to free radicals; β-carotene is critical for vision health.
- ▶ Lamb and goat meat contain more **vitamin A** which is essential for normal vision.
- ▶ Pastured pork and eggs have more **vitamin D**, which protects against osteoporosis.
- ▶ Meat from pastured poultry has more **collagen** and **protein**, which is needed to reduce joint pain and build, maintain, and repair tissue.

Better  
Fat  
Quality

Increase  
in  
Nutrients





## The how & why

Feed plays a major role. Forages are the edible parts of plants other than grain and include pasture vegetation and grasses. They are good sources of beneficial omega-3 fats.

In contrast, grains such as corn are dominated by more inflammatory omega-6 fats. As animals digest the pasture plants, the beneficial fat and nutrients in the plants eventually makes their way into nutritious meat, milk and eggs for human consumption.

In addition, animals that live most or all of their lives outside on pasture exercise more than animals do in confinement. This factor likely contributes to muscle development and results in higher protein content. Living outdoors also exposes animals to natural sunlight, resulting in higher vitamin D content in meat and eggs.



## At the grocery store

- Some of the terms found on packages are not 100% reliable or tightly regulated. Look for third party verified labels, or a local farm that uses humane practices but may not be certified due to cost. More at [foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels](http://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels)

- **Cage-free** means laying hens were not confined in cages. The claim is verified if the egg carton has a USDA Grade shield, but cage-free does not mean that the hens had any outdoor access.

- **Free-range** implies that the animals were raised freely outdoors. However, under USDA labeling laws, this is not always the case as they only have to be allowed access to outdoors with no provision for how much time or space must be allowed outside.

- **Grass-fed meat** signifies that only grass was fed to the animal. The USDA's "100% grass-fed" claim may be applied to meat from animals that were fed only 100% grass (forage) without grain or grain by-products. The USDA's staff reviews supporting documentation supplied by the company making the claim, but third-party inspections are not completed and humane standards are not considered in the grass-fed claim.

- **Pasture-raised** suggests pasture was included in the animal's diet. However, there is no standard diet requirement and no definition of pasture for this claim.

## The Bottom Line

Animals raised on pasture produce nutritionally superior food for people. In addition to the nutritional advantages, there are many animal welfare and environmental benefits associated with pasture-based animal agriculture. Please consider supporting your local family farmers who raise their animals humanely on grass and well-managed pasture.

# FACT

*Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) is a national nonprofit organization that works to ensure that all food-producing animals are raised in a humane and healthy manner. FACT offers grants, scholarships, webinars and a mentorship program for livestock and poultry farmers and ranchers who wish to raise their animals on pasture.*

[www.FoodAnimalConcernsTrust.org](http://www.FoodAnimalConcernsTrust.org)

Updated June 2021