

The Nutritional Benefits of Pasture-Raised Food

Across the Creek Farm

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

Pastured-raised beef, dairy, 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.

**Better
Fat
Quality**

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

Pastured-raised beef, dairy, poultry, lamb, goat meat, pork and eggs also have a lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 polyunsaturated fats. Omega-6 fats are considered more inflammatory than omega-3 fats. Research suggests that a lower omega-6 to omega-3 ratio in the diet may improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer.

**Increase
in
Nutrients**

Higher levels of vitamins

Pasture-raised beef, dairy, lamb, goat meat, pork and eggs have been found to have higher levels of **vitamin E**. Eggs, beef, dairy contain more **β-carotene**. Vitamin E and β-carotene are antioxidants that protect cells from damage due to free radicals; β-carotene is critical for vision health. Eggs from pastured laying hens also have more **vitamin D₃** which helps to protect against osteoporosis and heart disease.

More protein and collagen

Meat from pastured sheep, goats, poultry and pigs has more protein which is needed to build, maintain, and repair tissue. Pastured poultry meat also has more collagen, a type of protein that can reduce joint pain and improve athletic performance.



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 hens to natural sunlight, resulting in higher vitamin D₃ content in their 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

- **Cage-free** means laying hens were not confined in cages. There is no legal definition of this term under the FDA, but the claim is verified if the egg carton has a USDA Grade shield. It 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** implies that only grass was fed to the animal. However, the USDA does not tightly define this term or require on-farm inspections to verify the claim. While many farms use the term with integrity, it is possible that “grass-fed” can be used to label conventional meat or dairy that was started on grass but finished on grain.

- **Grass-finished** implies that grass was fed in the final phase of production, and therefore the animals were on grass their entire lives. However, this label is not regulated by the USDA.

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

The Bottom Line

Pasture-raised animals 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 promotes the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs. FACT offers grants, scholarships, webinars and a mentorship program for livestock and poultry farmers who wish to raise their animals on pasture.

www.FoodAnimalConcernsTrust.org