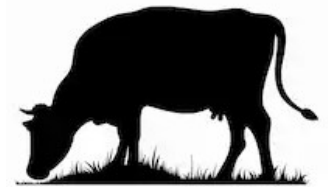




The Nutritional Benefits of Pasture-Raised Dairy Cows

Better feed, better milk

Dairy cows are designed to eat grass and other plants. However, conventionally-raised cows are confined inside for most of their lives and fed a diet high in grain. Cows that live outside on pasture instead of in confinement are able to graze on plants. This results in healthier animals ... and more nutritious food for people as well.



Studies show the nutritional value of milk from cows that consume grass and forage for their entire lives is higher than milk from cows that are fed grain.

Less saturated fat, more heart-healthy polyunsaturated fats

Better Fat Quality

- ▶ Replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats is associated with reduced blood levels of total and LDL cholesterol.
- ▶ Studies suggest that replacement reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attacks, strokes, and related deaths.

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

Increase in Nutrients

- ▶ Omega-6 fats are generally more inflammatory than omega-3 fats.
- ▶ Research suggests a lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats is more desirable and may improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.
- ▶ Conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), a natural fatty acid found in milk, has shown efficacy against cancer, obesity, and atherosclerosis.

Higher levels of antioxidants: vitamin E and β -carotene

- ▶ Vitamin E and β -carotene protect cells from damage due to free radicals.
- ▶ β -carotene is a precursor of vitamin A and is critical for vision health.

By the numbers...

Compared to cows that were fed grain, milk from cows raised 100% on pasture has up to:

10x more omega-3 fats

3x more conjugated linoleic acid (CLA)

70% lower omega-6: omega-3 ratio

2x higher poly-unsaturated: saturated fat ratio

2.3x more vitamin E

3x more β -carotene

Why feed matters

Milk quality is influenced by many factors, including an animal's genetics, age, breed, location, and **very significantly**, the animal's diet.

Dairy cows are ruminant animals. Ruminants have a stomach with four compartments, the largest of which is the rumen. The rumen is a fermentation chamber where fibrous grasses are digested by bacteria to produce high quality protein (i.e. milk).

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. Due to the way cows digest their food, they are able to convert the beneficial fat and nutrients in plants into more nutritious milk for human consumption.



Shopping for dairy

Grass-fed dairy implies that only grass was fed to the cows. However, the FDA 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 milk that came from cows that were fed both grain and grass.

"Pasture-raised" suggests that pasture was included in the animal's diet. However, there is no standard diet requirement or definition of pasture under this claim.

Because these claims are not 100% reliable, look for third party verified labels, or farms that use humane practices but may not be certified due to the costs involved. Learn more at: foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels



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.



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.