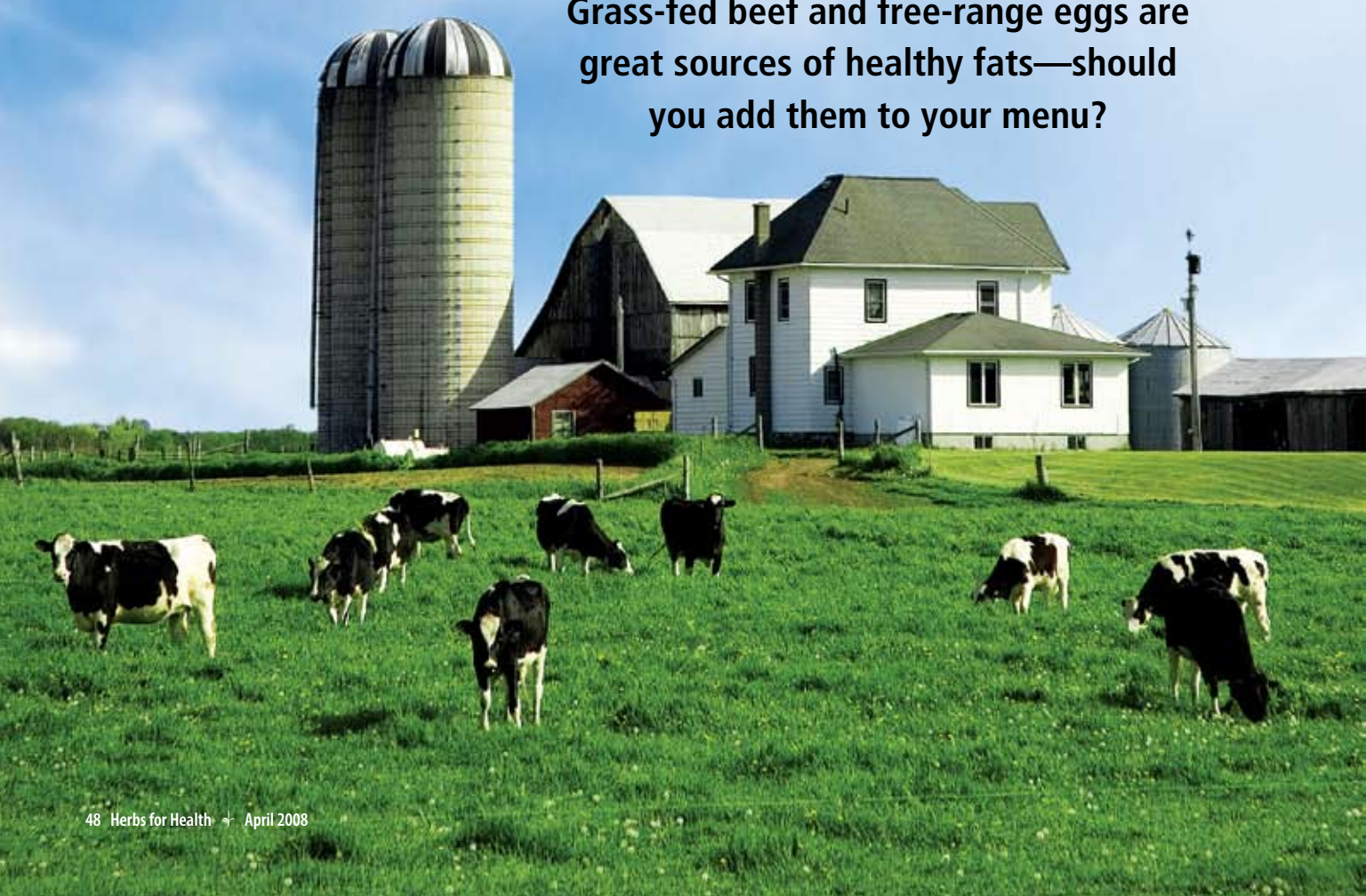


Better **Beef & Eggs**

Grass-fed beef and free-range eggs are great sources of healthy fats—should you add them to your menu?



By Kris Wetherbee

In an age when modern technology reigns supreme, sometimes the old ways of doing things still remain the best. Such is the case with the grass-fed movement—a growing trend that is gaining new status as a healthier and more eco-friendly way of producing meat and eggs.

It's true that raising animals on open pastures is hardly a new trend. After all, it's how cows have been consuming food since biblical times. At least it was until agribusiness took over after World War II, leading to the mass production of corn that eventually resulted in a stampede of factory-farmed cows being fattened on grain-based feed.

Breaking Tradition

By the 1950s, corn became golden to grow as animal feed for two reasons: government subsidies for the farmer and a faster, more profitable beef product. Cows fed high-calorie, less-nutritious corn put on weight much faster than cows consuming a traditional grass diet, not unlike the way high-calorie junk food has led to the globally escalating obesity epidemic among humans. However, shifting a cow's natural diet from grass to grain also compromises the health of the animal and, many would say, ultimately our own health as well.

As ruminants (animals that digest food in two steps), cows are grazing animals designed with specialized stomachs that efficiently digest and convert fibrous grasses, plants and shrubs into protein and fats. What their system is not designed to do is digest large quantities of starchy low-fiber grains, such as corn. Fiber-deficient rations allow fermentation acids to build up within the digestive tract, or "rumen," which can cause ulcers and other severe disorders that can sicken or even kill the animal. This situation requires that grain-fed cows also are fed continual doses of antibiotics and growth hormones to keep them well and gaining weight. The routine doses of antibiotics promote the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of

bacteria, or "superbugs," in humans. And traces of the hormones remaining in the meat have scientists concerned about the numerous potential hazards to the humans who consume it.

Feeding a cow grain changes the bacteria in the animal's gut. A cow's normal pH is neutral. However, the digestive tract of the modern feedlot cow is acidic, because grain is acidic. The increased acidity creates ideal conditions for the growth of *E. coli* and other pathogenic bacteria, according to a 1998 study published in *Science*. (Topps Meat Company recalled 27.1 million pounds of hamburger last October because of possible contamination with *E. coli*.) Not only have we broken down our food chain's barriers to deadly bacteria, we also have bred a nutritionally inferior food product containing more artery-clogging saturated fat and less of the crucial healthy fats than nature intended.

The Grass Advantage

My generation was raised on fat-laden beef and caged chickens with eggs so anemic that pale yellow became the accepted color for yolks. I remember my grandmother making a comment more than 30 years ago about how the beef and eggs in her day had much more flavor and color—a concept that seemed quite foreign to me at the time. But animals raised in open pastures and fed a natural diet of grass are far from foreign. The focus of the grass-fed movement is on maintaining healthy soil and rotational grass management so cows don't overgraze and grass has a chance to grow back.

Grass-fed beef raised to roam on high-quality pasture also results in a host of nutritional benefits. The meat naturally is leaner, with about one-half to one-third the saturated fat of grain-fed beef, resulting in fewer calories no matter how you slice it. Green feed also produces beef that's less likely to harbor potentially deadly bacteria like *E. coli*. What this beef doesn't skimp on are valuable nutrients, like beta-carotene and vitamins E and C, as well as essential fatty acids (EFAs), such as heart-healthy omega-3 and cancer-fighting conjugated linoleic acid (CLA). CLA is a group of

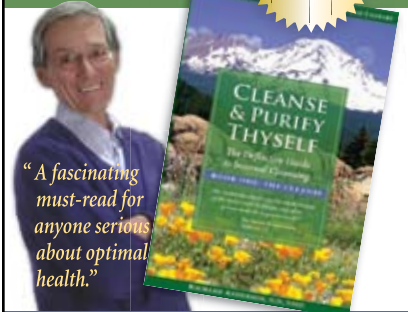


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Rick Metheney

Grass-fed beef is leaner than grain-fed and also contains more beta-carotene and heart-healthy essential fatty acids.

polyunsaturated fats found mainly in meat and dairy products.

According to 2002 research published in *Meat Science*, beef raised on grass have up to a tenfold increase of beta-carotene in their muscle tissues compared to grain-fed cows. Grass-fed beef also feature up to four times more vitamin E than meat from feedlot cows. Beta-carotene and vitamins E and C act as powerful antioxidants that can enhance immune function and protect cells from the dangers of free radicals—highly unstable oxygen molecules that can damage normal cells and lead to cancer. This antioxidant action also is linked to a lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Grass-fed beef has more EFAs than cows raised on grain, with up to six times more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. EFAs are polyunsaturated fats that help regulate mood, body temperature, organ function, insulin balance and joint health. EFAs also help enhance metabolic rates and lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels, resulting in a reduced risk for atherosclerosis, heart disease and stroke. And they play a vital role in reducing your risk for cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

EFAs are grouped into two families: omega-3s and omega-6s. The two omega groups work together, so it's important to maintain a proper balance of both families in order to promote good health. However, the omega-6 to omega-3 ratio often is out

of balance in the typical American diet because of our overconsumption of processed and fried foods, with many foods today having an omega-6 to omega-3 ratio of 20:1. Recommendations for the ideal ratio vary among experts, but 4:1 is the minimum, 2:1 is good and 1:1 is ideal.

This imbalance often is an issue with grain-fed beef as well. A ratio imbalance like this has been linked with the rising rate of inflammatory disorders, such as cardiovascular disease, inflammatory bowel disease, arthritis and cancer. As a comparison, the ratio for wild salmon typically is around 3:1 (three omega-6 parts to one omega-3). Grass-fed beef's ratio also is typically 3:1, with some lab analyses conducted by Grassland Beef even surpassing that of fish.

Products from animals raised on fresh pasture alone are the richest known sources, producing beef containing two to five times more CLA than products from animals fed grain-based diets. Though research still is somewhat in its infancy, numerous health benefits have been attributed to CLA, including building immune function and reducing body fat as well as the prevention of atherosclerosis, hypertension and diabetes.

Another intriguing aspect of CLA is that of cancer prevention. Researchers in both Finland and France measured CLA levels in the serum and breast tissues of women

with and without breast cancer. Women with the highest CLA levels had the lowest risk of cancer—up to 74 percent lower.

Added Benefits of a Grass Diet

In addition to the nutritional advantages, grass-fed beef promotes animal welfare and environmental benefits to boot. For example, happy cows don't just come from California—as the familiar television commercial says. In reality, happy cows are raised on grass, as they live very low-stress lives. Grass also is kinder to the environment. Growing corn takes an incredible amount of fossil fuel energy via petrochemical fertilizers, pesticides and machines used to sow, grow and harvest the crops. Grass-fed cows do all the fertilizing, mowing and harvesting themselves.

The manure that grass-fed cows deposit on the grass also deposits nutrients that fertilize the pastures they graze. However, manure from feedlot cows and other forms of factory farming build up in concentrated amounts over a small amount of space, leading to a toxic mass of animal wastes

that typically pollute the water and air.

Grass-fed beef products are becoming more and more available at farmers' markets; specialty food stores; mail-order companies, such as Grassland Beef (www.GrasslandBeef.com) or Conservation Beef (www.ConservationBeef.com); and sometimes even supermarkets.

Looking back, my grandmother's comment was part of what propelled my husband Rick and me to move to the country more than 17 years ago so we could raise food that tasted the way she remembered—well-textured and far less fatty, with a lighter, more meaty flavor that doesn't weigh you down. Seems my grandmother was right after all! †

Kris Wetherbee is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Herbs for Health. She lives in the hills of western Oregon with her photographer husband, Rick Wetherbee. Visit her website at www.KrisWetherbee.com.

The reference list for this article is extensive. If you would like a copy, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to "Better Beef," Herbs for Health, 1503 SW 42nd St., Topeka, KS 66609; or e-mail us at editor@HerbsForHealth.com.



Rick Wetherbee

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Rick McInerney

SPINACH & MUSHROOM QUICHE

SERVES 4 TO 6

This egg-based quiche is great for breakfast, brunch, lunch or dinner. Serve with fresh fruit and whole-grain rolls for a delightful brunch, or add on a green salad for a deliciously hearty lunch.

- 1 (9-inch) unbaked deep-dish pastry shell
- 3 cups chopped and lightly packed fresh spinach
- 1½ cups chopped turkey ham (cut into 1-inch cubes)
- 1 cup chopped cremini mushrooms
- ⅓ to ½ cup sliced green onions
- ½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese
- 3 true free-range eggs (see “Hens on Herbs” on Page 54)
- ¾ cup half-and-half
- ½ tablespoon flour
- ⅛ teaspoon white pepper

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Pierce pastry

Sources

American Grassfed Association
www.AmericanGrassfed.org

American Grassfed Beef
www.AmericanGrassfedBeef.com

Conservation Beef
www.ConservationBeef.com

Grassland Beef
www.GrasslandBeef.com

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shell with fork; bake for 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven and reduce temperature to 350 degrees.

In a large bowl, combine spinach, turkey ham, mushrooms, green onions and both cheeses; toss gently to mix. Spoon into the prepared pie shell. In the same bowl, mix together eggs, half-and-half, flour and pepper until smooth. Pour mixture evenly over spinach filling in pan. Bake for 40 to 50 minutes or until center is set. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.



Rick Wehner

ZUCCHINI BEEF STIR-FRY

SERVES 4

Here's a quick-and easy-dish that features grass-fed beef in a medley of garden-fresh vegetables. You also can replace the zucchini with other types of summer squash, like crookneck or scallop.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided**
- 1 pound grass-fed beef round, cut into strips (or any cut good for stir-fry)**
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced**
- 4 carrots, cut into matchstick-size strips (about 2 cups)**
- 4 small zucchini, cut into matchstick-size strips (about 5 cups)**
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh gingerroot**
- 1/8 teaspoon dried red chile pepper flakes**
- 2 tablespoons teriyaki sauce**
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce**
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice**

In a large wok or skillet, heat 1/2 tablespoon of the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add beef and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes or until cooked to just about medium. Remove beef from skillet and set aside. Heat the remaining 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil, then add onion and sauté for 2 minutes. Add carrots and cook for 2 minutes more. Add zucchini, gingerroot and red chile pepper and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes more or until vegetables are crisp-tender.

Stir in the teriyaki sauce, soy sauce and lemon juice and heat through. Toss in beef and serve immediately.



Hens on Herbs

We all know by now how healthy greens and herbs are for us. As it turns out, they're good for chickens, too. Chickens kept in crowded, inhumane conditions rarely see the light of day—let alone insects, worms, grass, seeds or any other type of forage that comprise a chicken's natural diet. Instead they are kept confined in cramped quarters and fed a diet consisting mainly of corn, soy or cottonseed with additives. But hens allowed to freely range on natural pasture are fed more than just grain. They also consume green plants, seeds, bugs, and sometimes mice and small snakes as they strut happily across a field searching and scratching for food. And a more nutritious diet results in tastier and more nutritious eggs.

It's a difference that becomes evident the moment you crack open an egg: Yolks from caged birds are a very pale shade of yellow, while yolks from free-range hens are as bright as an orange. When grass and bugs are added to the menu, eggs from free-range hens become golden from a different perspective—with significantly more vitamin E, folic acid, vitamin B12 and omega-3s than eggs from factory hens.

Compare for yourself. Crack open an egg from a factory hen and one from a free-range hen, cook them up and then taste the difference. Not only does the confined hen's egg taste inferior, it's also nutritionally inferior.

Herbs for Health's sister publication *Mother Earth News's* 2007 egg-testing project compared eggs from hens raised freely on pasture (or housed in moveable pens that are rotated frequently to maximize access to fresh pasture) to that of the official U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrient data for commercial eggs (i.e., from confined hens). The project found that true free-range eggs can contain one-third less cholesterol and one-fourth less saturated fat than commercially produced eggs. They also can contain up to two-thirds more vitamin A, three times more vitamin E, seven times more beta-carotene (again, just look at the yolk) and two times more omega-3 fatty acids.