

What is your beef IQ? Beef and Health

In this edition, we explore how the beef industry has evolved over the years. We will also explore package labeling, caloric intake, and the healthfulness of beef.

The amount of fat and calories in beef has changed since the 1900s. Producers are working to supply the consumer with leaner beef through production practices and selecting for leaner genetics. Retailers are also trying to provide a much leaner product to their customers by trimming outside fat from beef products.

There is very little fat in beef after years of making beef leaner and healthier. Beef is one of the best sources of monounsaturated fat, which is also found in olive oil.

Inherently, there is very little difference between a grass-fed and grain-fed beef products. Even though there is a difference in production methods, there is very little difference in the fatty acid profile of grain-fed and grass-fed beef. Grass feeding actually has a higher percentage of saturated fat when compared to grain-fed beef.

With different production methods of beef, there is consumer concern about the nutrition value of each. Labels such as grass-fed, all natural, organic, and non-GMO lead consumers to believe that they are “more healthy” than conventionally raised beef. However, research shows that there is very little significant difference in nutritional value among these labels.

The healthiness of ground beef depends on preparation, moderation, and variety in the diet. A lot of the fat found in ground beef will drip away when cooked on a grill. The beef patty itself has very little fat. There is also no difference in cholesterol levels among any of the meats.

While we are consuming more calories than in the past, the addition is typically not coming from increased meat consumption. Grain, flour, cereal products, and added fats and oils are adding many more calories to the diet. In the 1970's, there was a fad for high carb and low protein diets that led to the higher obesity rates within the U.S. Now we see fads encouraging high protein and low carb diet recommendations that have their own health concerns for some.

The difference in product packaging can be attributed to different things including production and cost. Consumers like to see what they're buying so the over wrap packaging is used, but it can be a little more expensive. There is no difference in nutrition, no matter how the product is packaged.

The placement of meat in the store is based on different criteria. The three-tiered case is utilized for beef that is more economical and price driven for the consumer. The full-service counter is utilized to target consumers who are more taste driven and buy more prime cuts.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the information provided and visit pathtotheplate.tamu.edu for more information.

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