

Consumer Reports

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PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS

Is grass-fed beef better?

Thanks to a new rule, a "grass fed" label on packages of beef, along with "USDA Process Verified," means that the meat came from animals that actually ate grass and had access to pastures during the growing season. We checked whether it's worth paying for the grass fed beef, sold at some supermarkets, natural-food stores, and online.

The claim. Beef from cattle raised on grass is better for you than beef from corn- and grain-fed animals, says the American Grassfed Association, a trade group, and raising cattle on grass is better for the environment.

The check. Our reporter reviewed research on how grass-fed beef affects human health and the environment.

CR's take. This grass fed beef could have benefits. The limited research completed to date suggests that steak and hamburger from grass-fed cattle may contain less total fat per serving, according to a review by the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists. Grass-fed steak can also have higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which may help reduce heart-disease risk. Grass-fed ground beef usually has more conjugated linoleic acid, which might improve the immune system and help fight cancer, atherosclerosis, and type 2 diabetes, lab and animal studies show. And raising cattle on well-managed pastures can lessen erosion and boost soil fertility, the scientists' group found.