

Common Potential Concerns About Today's Beef Production

Feeding Practices

Is corn an unnatural diet for cattle? Is it only fed to cattle because it's cheap?

No. Cattle can get the nutrients they need from eating a wide range of plants, including a variety of grains and grasses. Most beef raised in the United States comes from grain-finished cattle, which spend most of their lives on pasture eating grass before going to a feedlot for four to six months. While at a feedlot, cattle are fed a combination of grain and hay formulated by a professional nutritionist to ensure a well-balanced and nutritious diet.

Grain feeding isn't new, it's just more sophisticated. In the United States, cattle have been fed grain for at least 200 years. Cattle are fed grains like corn because they are nutritious, energy-rich, and can be stored for use throughout the year. Since grass doesn't grow year-round in most of the United States, feeding grains like corn to cattle help farmers and ranchers raise a consistent, year-round supply of great-tasting beef.

Do corn subsidies indirectly subsidize the beef industry?

No. Farmers and ranchers use diverse methods for raising cattle, and they use a variety of food sources for their animals, which may include grains like corn, wheat, barley and sorghum as well as hay and other forages. With today's historically high corn prices, farmers and ranchers are making more use of alternative food sources for their cattle. It is also important to remember that while cattle eat a grain-based diet for approximately four to six months, the majority of their lives is spent foraging on plants and grasses in pastures. But regardless how cattle are fed, it results in delicious, nutrient-rich beef that fits well in a healthy diet.

Did feedlots and modern beef production methods encourage the emergence of *E. coli* O157:H7 as a foodborne illness?

No. Bacteria like *E. coli* are found naturally in the environment and in the intestinal tracts of healthy animals whether in a feedlot or grazing on pasture. Research to date has not found a significant difference in the likelihood of cattle to carry *E. coli* between those on pasture or in feedlots.

Today, the scientifically-validated safety practices included in modern beef production methods coupled with strict government requirements allow us to control foodborne pathogens in the beef supply more effectively than ever. The beef industry continues to invest millions of dollars in developing new technologies with the goal of eliminating foodborne illness.

Are dirty conditions in feedlots to blame for *E. coli* O157:H7?

No. The farmers and ranchers that run feedlots take great care to provide the optimal conditions for keeping their cattle healthy. For example, feedlots are carefully designed to ensure that cattle stay dry, and feedlots are scraped regularly to keep them clean. We



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know that healthy cattle grow better and produce safe, wholesome food for our families and yours.

Can *E. coli* O157:H7 be eliminated or reduced by feeding cattle grass instead of grain?

No. *E. coli* O157:H7 is capable of living in the digestive system of all cattle, regardless of what they have been fed. While some scientific evidence does show that manipulating diet can affect bacterial levels in cattle's digestive system, these studies have not found that a particular feeding regimen can reliably reduce levels of *E. coli* O157:H7. While research in reducing the prevalence of *E. coli* O157:H7 in healthy animals continues, our efforts are focused on preventing it from entering the food supply.

Is crowding animals together in a feedlot bad for animals and the environment?

No. In fact, feedlots allow for the efficient raising of beef utilizing fewer natural resources like land, feed and water. And "crowding" is a common misperception. Feedlot cattle live in pens that allow ample room to move around, but they often intentionally "crowd" themselves together in one corner of the pen. This behavior is normal for herd animals like cattle. Additionally, environmental factors like water quality, air quality and land utilization are monitored and managed in feedlots daily. In fact, most large feedlots have environmental engineers on staff or on contract to ensure the operation is in compliance with the strict U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations that govern concentrated animal feeding operations. Feedlots also allow for specially-trained workers to constantly monitor the health and well-being of the animals.

Is the practice of feeding grain to animals taking food away from the hungry?

No. Feeding grain to livestock allows for the efficient production of high quality protein we need in our diets and cannot get from other food sources. Besides, in the U.S. only 20 percent of total grain production is used to feed livestock.

It also is important to remember that grain isn't the only thing cattle eat. All cattle eat grass for the majority of their lives, whether they are conventionally raised or grass finished, and they have the unique capability of converting grass that people cannot eat into nutritious food for people.

Does it require 75 gallons of oil to bring a steer to slaughter?

No. According to a 2002 analysis from Dr. Michael Grabowski from the Colorado School of Mines, a more realistic figure is 13.83 gallons. In fact, U.S. beef farmers and ranchers are committed to producing more food using less natural resources, and provide 25 percent of the world's beef supply with only 10 percent of the world's cattle.

Nutrition

Does beef have a role in a healthy diet?

Absolutely. As the nation focuses its attention on reducing calories to reduce its waistline, it's important that people get more nutrients from fewer calories. Calorie-for-



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calorie, beef is one of the most naturally nutrient-rich foods. A 3-ounce serving of lean beef contributes less than 10 percent of calories to a 2,000-calorie diet, yet it supplies more than 10 percent of the Daily Value for ten essential nutrients. Eating a protein-rich meal or snack like beef also makes you feel full longer, and satisfies cravings faster.

Are Americans eating too much beef/meat?

No. The Dietary Guidelines and MyPyramid recommend adults eat 5 ½ ounces (or 156 grams) of lean protein each day, and most Americans already are consuming red meat well within these guidelines. On average, adults are consuming 2.3 ounces (65 grams) of red meat each day.

Safety

Are *E. coli* and other foodborne illness outbreaks becoming more frequent?

No. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that the nationwide incidence of common foodborne illnesses like *E. coli* O157:H7 have not changed significantly in the last three years. Additionally, between 1996 and 2004, the incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections decreased 25 percent.

Is there manure in my meat?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service maintains a zero tolerance for manure or any other contamination on carcasses and especially in meat. Inspectors check continuously to ensure compliance and reject carcasses if this policy is violated. In addition to strict government regulations, companies use science-based intervention technologies such as hot water washes, steam vacuums and sophisticated testing regimens to ensure the safety and wholesomeness of beef products.

Is organic food, locally-produced, or "slow food" safer than "conventional" food?

No. All beef in the United States is subject to the same stringent government regulations and inspection procedures that ensure safety. While beef producers provide a range of different products that consumers demand, safety is the common denominator among every kind of beef you buy.

Is organic food or "slow food" better for the environment than "conventional" food?

No. Modern, efficient beef production results in more pounds of beef utilizing fewer resources than less-efficient production methods. If 1950s technology were used today, we would need an additional 165 million acres to produce the same amount of beef. That's an area roughly the size of Texas! All beef producers go to great lengths to be good stewards of the environment, regardless of which production method they follow. In fact, 85 percent of all beef farmers and ranchers, regardless of the type of beef they produce, say environmental conservation is important to their success. Additionally, U.S. beef farmers and ranchers are using fewer natural resources to provide more abundant



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and affordable beef; they supply 25 percent of the world's beef with just 10 percent of the world's cattle.

Animal Welfare

Is animal welfare a priority for cattle farmers and ranchers?

Absolutely. We are in the business of caring for animals. Providing an optimal environment for our cattle, with ample food, water and healthcare, is the right thing to do and it creates an ideal setting for them to grow. We take our responsibility to our cattle very seriously, and we believe even one instance of mistreatment is too many.

We stand behind this principle with educational programs, like the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program, that outline the essential elements for cattle care from the farm to the processing facility, including guidelines for providing proper nutrition, following disease prevention practices and maintaining safe and humane facilities for cattle.

What kind of conditions are cattle raised in?

Most beef cattle are born and spend the majority of their lives on the farms and ranches like those you may see along highways and country roads, grazing in herds on large pastures. At 12 to 16 months of age, most beef cattle are then taken to a feedlot where they are fed a nutritionally-balanced and energy-rich diet for approximately four to six months. Cattle in a feedlot are typically separated into herds of 100 animals and live in pens that allow about 125 to 250 square feet of room per animal, and they are carefully monitored to ensure optimum health. After cattle reach the appropriate weight, they are sold to a processor.

Family Farmers

Have corporations replaced family farmers?

No. In fact, more than 97 percent of U.S. beef cattle farms and ranches are family farms. Also, most beef cattle operations are smaller than you might think; according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the typical herd of beef cattle in the U.S. is only 50 animals.

Does most beef in the United States come from a feedlot?

The majority of cattle in the U.S. have likely spent time in feedlots, which provide cattle room to roam and grow, access to clean water, a balanced diet and veterinary care. However, all beef cattle, regardless of production method, spend the majority of their lives on pasture eating grass.



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