



## Which Beef is Better?

“CHB Bites” is a column designed to keep you in-the-know about the Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) program. To get involved with CHB on social media, search *Certified Hereford Beef* on Facebook and Pinterest, @certifiedherefordbeef on Instagram and @crtherefordbeef on Twitter.

Livestock producers have raised cattle for generations using a variety of different production methods. For consumers, a crossroad at the meat case is deciding whether to pay an added premium for a favorite steak or roast. Unfortunately, many misinterpret health and sustainability implications of major cattle production methods that significantly impact how producers raise beef. One of the most common debates is between grass-fed and grain-fed beef.

### A calf's lifestyle

There are a number of differences between these two production systems, but the most important to note is the discrepancy between “fed” and “finished.” Most U.S. cattle are fed grass for more than half their life before transitioning to a high-energy, grain-finishing diet. In contrast, a grass-finishing diet is one where cattle are raised, weaned and finished on grass or a blend of forages.

In the U.S., the majority of calves are born and raised on a ranch, where the average herd size is less than 50 head. While on the ranch, they consume a diet of mom's milk and grass for approximately six months. Then, they are weaned and backgrounded, meaning calves are separated from their mothers and start a diet consisting of mostly grass and supplemental feed.

After backgrounding, calves enter the finishing lot to develop “marbling,” or small flecks of fat found between the muscle fibers of meat products. The more



Most grain-finished cattle in the U.S. spend the majority of their lifetime eating grass before transitioning to a grain-finishing diet.

marbling, the more tender and better the eating experience!

### Grain vs. grass diets

Grain-fed calves receive a professionally formulated and balanced, high-energy diet of ingredients like corn, dried distiller grains, roughages and forage blends. This diet allows cattle to optimize weight gain while maximizing the consumer eating experience.

Grass-finished cattle are strictly fed a blend of forages. As a result, they reach a desired endpoint weight at a much later date than grain-finished cattle. It can take grass-finished steers 18 months longer than grain-finished steers to reach their peak finishing condition. This represents a significantly greater commitment for feed, water and land resources which is difficult to sustain.

Building on the influence of consumer buying power, a common myth about grass-finished beef is that it is healthier than grain-finished beef. While a study found grass-finished

strip steaks were leaner than grain-finished steaks, both grain- and grass-finished samples were considered lean, as they possessed fat contents less than 4.3%<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, while grass-finished beef does contain higher levels of Omega-3 fatty acids compared to grain-finished beef, there were no significant differences in Omega-6 fatty acids or total cholesterol<sup>1</sup>.

Any nutrient differences between grass- and grain-finished beef are minimal; neither option is healthier than the other. Both are excellent sources of dietary-essential vitamins and nutrients for the human diet.

Concisely, beef is a safe, healthy choice providing important vitamins and nutrients to the human diet. Certified Hereford Beef® is premium-quality, grain-finished beef raised by local U.S. Hereford ranching families dedicated to producing an exceptional product your family can safely enjoy. **HW**

For more information about Certified Hereford Beef, visit [CertifiedHerefordBeef.com](http://CertifiedHerefordBeef.com) or email [info@herefordbeef.org](mailto:info@herefordbeef.org)

<sup>1</sup> Leheska, J.M., Thompson, L.D., Howe, J.C., Hentges, E., Boyce, J., Brooks, J.C., Shriver, B., Hoover, L., & Miller, M.F. (2008). Effects of conventional and grass-feeding systems on the nutrient composition of beef. *Journal of Animal Science*, 86, 3575-3585.