

2003 Article

Rich in omega-3s

The following is an excerpt from *Why Grassfed is Best* by Jo Robinson

New research, most of it conducted since 1985, reveals that every cell and system in the human body relies on omega-3s. Your brain, for example, is largely composed of fat, and omega-3 fatty acids are the most important of those fats. If your diet has an adequate amount of these nutrients, you have a lower risk of a host of mental disorders including depression, aggressive behavior, attention-deficit disorder (ADD), schizophrenia, and dementia. Researchers are now experimenting with treating these disorders with omega-3s, with some preliminary successes.

Your cardiovascular system is equally dependent on omega-3s. People with diets rich in omega-3s are less likely to have high blood pressure or irregular heart rhythms. Remarkably, they are half as likely to die from a heart attack or stroke.

People with an adequate supply of omega-3s may also be less vulnerable to cancer. For example, a French study determined that women with the highest levels of omega-3s in their tissues were least likely to have invasive breast cancer. Heart patients who followed an omega-3 rich diet for three years not only had a 70 percent reduction in the risk of dying from a heart attack, they had a 61 percent reduction in the risk of dying from all types of cancer.

The Nutritional Benefits of Foods Raised on Pasture

The disease-fighting properties of omega-3 fatty acids take on more significance when you realize that the American diet is greatly deficient in these fats. Only 40 percent of Americans consume adequate levels. Twenty percent have levels so low they defy detection.

Feeding grain to ruminants is one of the hidden reasons for this widespread deficiency. Every day that an animal spends in the feedlot, its meat contains fewer and fewer omega-3 fatty acids. By the time the meat is deemed fit for consumption, it is almost devoid of omega-3s.

There is a simple explanation for the rapid decline in omega-3s in grain-fed cattle: omega-3s are formed in the green leaves of plants. When the animals graze on their natural diet of greens, their diet is automatically rich in these essential fats. (Sixty percent of the fat in grass is a type of omega-3 fatty acid called "alpha-linolenic acid" or LNA). When the animals are taken off fresh pasture and fed ingredients poor in omega-3s (such as grain), their tissues gradually lose their store of these potentially lifesaving fats.

What's more, the animals accumulate higher than normal amounts of a competing type of essential fatty acid called "omega-6 fatty acids" which are most highly concentrated in the seeds of plants. Excessive amounts of omega-6s have been linked with a higher risk of obesity, diabetes, cancer, and immune disorders such as asthma and arthritis.

A grain diet has the same detrimental effect on bison, sheep, and other ruminants as it does on cattle - it makes their meat and dairy products higher in fat and disrupts their normal ratio of essential fatty acids. For decades, the term "grainfed meat" has been interpreted as an assurance of quality. In reality, it should be a warning sign that the meat is going to be less desirable for human health. ❌

All pasture-raised foods, including chicken, eggs and turkey, are much higher in omega-3s as well as CLAs, beta-carotenes, and Vitamin A. They are all much lower in fat and cholesterol.

Nutritional benefits of Forks Farm pasture-raised foods

Comparisons with standard foods based on tests of our own chicken, eggs, and beef

Large Egg ¹

- 11% fewer calories
- Same amount of protein
- 34% less cholesterol
- 10% less total fat
- 19% less saturated fat
- 278% more omega-3 fatty acids
- Omega-6:Omega-3: 7:1 (16:1 for standard)
- 73% more Vitamin A

Whole Chicken ¹

- 17% fewer calories
- 4% less protein
- 9% less cholesterol
- 22% less total fat
- 29% less saturated fat
- 100% more omega-3 fatty acids
- Omega-6:Omega-3: 9:1 (16:1 for standard)
- 50% more Vitamin A

Beef (top round) ²

- 40% fewer calories
- 8% more protein
- 10% less cholesterol
- 90% less total fat
- 89% less saturated fat

Beef (ribeye) ³

- 100-400% more omega-3 fatty acids

Sources of data

¹ Forks Farm egg and chicken analyses provided by *American Westech, Inc.*, in Harrisburg, PA. Comparisons based on values reported in the *USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference*. This study was funded in part by a grant from the *USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program*.

² Forks farm grass-fed beef analysis provided by *Lancaster Laboratories*, Lancaster PA. Comparisons based on values reported in *Nutrient Values of Muscle Foods, National Livestock and Meat Board, Ed. One, 1988 & USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference*.

³ Based on analysis of our beef by *West Virginia University Beef Research Project*.

To learn more about the benefits of grass-fed, visit eatwild.com.