

Why Grassfed is Better than Organic

By Jo Robinson

Organic meat, poultry, and dairy products are now available at most supermarkets, which is a change for the better. When you buy organic, you know your food will be free of pesticide residues, synthetic hormones, genetically modified organisms, and a long list of questionable additives. You also have the satisfaction of knowing that the farms that produced that food are eco-friendly.

But organic is not enough. In fact, if I had to choose between organic animal products and grassfed animal products, I'd choose grassfed every time. Why? The main reason is that grassfed meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products are nutritionally superior to organic products. This comes as a surprise to many people who have come to equate "organic" with "more nutritious." Alas, this is not always true. For the most part, the term "organic" is simply a guarantee of what the food does *not* contain. You know the food won't contain residues from pesticides, antibiotics, synthetic hormones, or any of those six syllable chemicals you can't pronounce. But organic food may still be deficient in nutrients or loaded with sugar and "bad" fat. For example, there are organic cereals on the market that are overly sweet. You may be consuming fewer pesticide residues when you choose Organic Honey Oatios over Honey Nut Cheerios, but you'll still be consuming too many simple carbohydrates. An organic label does not guarantee good nutrition.

The limitations of the "organic" designation are even more evident when it comes to animal products. Organic but grainfed beef, lamb, or bison will be "cleaner" than ordinary feedlot meat, but it won't be any more nutritious. When a ruminant is taken off pasture and fattened on an artificial grain diet, it loses its stores of vitamins E, beta-carotene, CLA, and omega-3s. It doesn't matter whether the grain is organic or not. Feeding large amounts of any kind of grain to a grazing animal makes the meat less beneficial for human consumption. In order to have the healthiest meat, the animals need to remain on their *natural* diet of fresh pasture. Compared with grainfed meat, grassfed meat has as much as four times more vitamin E, five times more cancer-fighting CLA, three times more heart-friendly omega-3s, and twice as much beta-carotene. It is also lower in calories, total fat, and saturated fat. (For more details and references, refer to *Why Grassfed Is Best!* or visit <http://eatwild.com>)

Furthermore, your risk of being sickened by *E. coli* bacteria may be much greater when you eat grainfed meat. Feeding grain of any kind to a ruminant increases the acidity of its digestive tract. This abnormally acid environment causes the *E. coli* to multiply and also to become more acid-resistant. According to a recent study published in the journal *Science*, these altered bacteria are much more likely to survive the cleansing acidity of your digestive juices and make you ill.

Finally, grassfed meat is likely to be free of the most undesirable elements even when it is *not* organically certified. I don't know of any grassfarmers who doctor their animals with synthetic hormones, put antibiotics in the feed, or use herbicides or pesticides on their fields. When grassfarms lack organic certification, it's usually because nitrogen fertilizers are used on the fields or the animals are treated with medications to

rid them of parasites. Pastured poultry or pig producers may lack organic certification for a different reason: the high cost of organic grain. Many have found it's not possible to use organic grain and make a reasonable profit. Yet their products are still more nutritious than those from animals fed organic grain but denied access to fresh pasture. For example, eggs from a free-range hen will be higher in omega-3s, vitamin E, and vitamin A than eggs from a hen raised in confinement and fed organic grain. The free-range hen will also be spared the indignity of suffocating in ammonia fumes and fecal dust.

All this said, I believe that the best choice of all is buying products from organically certified grassfarmers. When ruminants are raised on organic pasture and when pastured pigs and poultry are supplemented with organic grain, you have the best of both worlds—pure food that is also highly nutritious, just the way Nature made it. If I have to pay more for the privilege, I'm willing to do it. But until more consumers come around to this point of view, there will be many grassfarmers who cannot afford to go 100 percent organic. Until that time, I'd urge consumers to choose grassfed over organic every time!

Jo Robinson is a New York Times bestselling writer. To purchase her 128-page book, Why Grassfed Is Best! (\$7.50 plus shipping) go to <http://eatwild.com> or call 206-463-4156 during West Coast business hours. Also, visit her website to find suppliers of grassfed products and new research about the benefits of grassfarming. E-mail: jo@eatwild.com