



Benefits: Nutritional For the Animals For the Environment For the Far

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Beyond Organic

By Jo Robinson

Organic meat, poultry, and dairy products are now available at your supermarket, which is the better. When you see the organic label, you know the food is going to be free of pesticides, synthetic hormones, genetically modified organisms, and a long list of questionable additives. But when it comes to animal production, organic is not enough. We need to be raising animal species-appropriate diets.

Few consumers realize that many producers of "organic" or "naturally raised" animal products feed their animals in confinement and feed them grain—just like the operators of conventional feedlots. ***Feeding large amounts of grain to a grazing animal decreases the nutritional value of its product whether the grain is organic or conventionally raised.*** The reason is simple. Compared with pasture-raised animals, grain-fed animals have far fewer omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, grainfed animals have fewer of these important nutrients in their meat and dairy products. Grainfeeding also interferes with the creation of a cancer-fighting compound called conjugated linoleic acid or CLA.⁽²⁾ A test by an independent lab determined that milk from one of the largest organic grain-fed dairies had no more omega-3 fatty acids or CLA than milk from ordinary dairies. Similarly, meat from organic grain-fed beef had a less favorable nutritional profile as meat from the largest Kansas feedlot.

The same story holds true for organic but confinement-raised poultry. Their meat and eggs contain fewer omega-3s or vitamin E than the products you find in the supermarket.⁽³⁾ (Unless the birds are given special supplements along with the grain.)

For many consumers, food safety is an even bigger concern than nutrition. Once again, grassfed offers an important advantage. It has been known for decades that grain feeding makes a ruminant's digestive tract more acid. Now we know that this acidic environment speeds the growth of the dangerous *E. coli* bacteria and, even worse, makes the bugs more acid-resistant. Alarming numbers of acid-resistant bacteria are much more likely to survive the cleansing acidity of our own digestive tracts and make us ill. ⁽⁴⁾

Depriving our livestock of fresh greens and vastly increasing their consumption of grain has jeopardized our health in ways people never imagined. Although feeding organically raised animals reduces our reliance on pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, it does *not* provide the food that we intended to eat.

Jo Robinson is a *New York Times* bestselling writer. Visit <http://eatwild.com>, to find local grassfed products and the latest research about the benefits of grassfarming.

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