



Your Daily Green Bit

Summer grilling: Go for sustainable meat

Dad will as usual be manning the grill, Father's Day or not, but you can make it special for him by sourcing the highest quality, healthiest meat. In our book, that means sustainably and humanely produced. Neither standard is remotely approached in conventional animal factory farms, also known as concentrated feeding operations (CAFOs).



Most conventional U.S. beef cattle are given antibiotics, which contribute to drug-resistant bacteria in people, and growth hormones, which are being studied for possible links to cancer. The air and water pollution caused by CAFO manure lagoons is unhealthy for humans and aquatic creatures alike. And, long before the first U.S. case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or "mad cow," was found in 2003, we've felt squeamish at the thought of the animal protein that goes into conventional cattle feed, because this is the way that BSE spreads. In addition, as Michael Pollan has long pointed out, the natural diet of ungulates (cattle, goats, sheep) is grass, not corn or grain. The latter cause them discomfort and makes them more vulnerable to disease (hence the antibiotics). For more about the environmental and health threats of conventional meat production, visit [Sustainable Table's](#) website and the award-winning [Meatrix](#) film series.

Here are some labels to look for in supermarkets and online when shopping for meat that's healthier and tastier for Dad and the whole family. If you want an animal to have had a quality life, do note that "free range" is a meaningless, unverified label term. You can also buy local meat at your nearest [farmers' market](#); if it's not labelled, ask the farmers whether they follow the sustainable animal husbandry methods listed below.

*[American Grassfed Association](#): Cows eat grass, period, and standards require they spend most of their lives outside in the pasture. Meat from animals that have received antibiotics cannot have the label.

*[Animal Welfare Approved](#): On this label, which is exclusive to family farms, cows eat grass, corn or grain, but not animal protein. Only sick animals get antibiotics (but they do stay in the program). They are required to live mostly out in the fields.

*[USDA Organic](#): Cows may eat only 100% certified organic grass, corn or grain; if fed antibiotics, they are removed from the label program. They're required to have "access" to pasture, but this is not clearly defined the way it is with the two labels above.

* [Certified Humane](#): Animals only eat grass, corn or grain; oddly for a humane label, pasture time is not required; only sick animals get antibiotics, but they aren't removed from the program.

* [Food Alliance Certified](#): Animals are fed grass, corn and grain, never animal proteins, except for dairy products given to hogs. Pasturage is not required. Antibiotics only go to sick animals. This label's plus is its requirement that the creatures be slaughtered humanely, in the least painful and frightening way.

Sustainable meat makes for a better barbecue. At the very least, you've showed Dad and the planet that you care. He may tease you for going through the trouble, but he'll be secretly pleased, and we'll wager the taste will win him over.