

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 see the organic label, you know the food is going to 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 less harmful to the environment.

But organic is not enough. Few consumers realize that many of the largest organic producers raise their animals in confinement and feed them grain, just like ordinary commercial producers. Feeding large amounts of grain to a grazing animal decreases the nutritional value of its products whether the grain is ordinary grain, genetically modified grain, or organic grain. For example, in a recent test, milk from an organic dairy had no more omega-3 fatty acids or cancer-fighting CLA than the milk from a non-organic confinement dairy. For maximum nutritional benefits, the animals gotta graze.

Similarly, meat from a cow raised in an organic feedlot operation has the same increased risk of E. coli infection as meat from an ordinary feedlot operation. All types of grain make the digestive tract of a ruminant abnormally acid. This acidic environment causes the E. coli to multiply and 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 our digestive juices and make us ill. Taking animals out of their natural environment and feeding them an unnatural diet has jeopardized human health far more than anyone imagined.

The best of all possible worlds, in my opinion, is to buy products from organically certified, pasture-based farms. Then you have all of the nutritional advantages of grassfed products plus the assurance that the meat is free of pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics. But many grassfarmers do not have full organic certification even though they do not use drugs or hormone. Some use small amounts of nitrogen fertilizer on their pastures. Others treat their animal to rid them of parasites. Many pastured poultry and pig producers cannot afford to buy high-priced organic grain and still have competitive prices. (Non-ruminants need to be given some grain in addition to pasture because they cannot glean all their nutrients from grass.) And some grassfarmers meet all the criteria but want to spare themselves the time and expense of annual organic certification.

Clearly, it takes an enlightened consumer to weigh all these pros and cons and decide exactly which products to buy. But it's important not to blindly trust the organic label. Animals need more than an organic diet ---they need their original diet! And now we know that when animals are fed the food they are designed to eat, their products are ideally suited for our needs as well. We are part of a cycle that is far grander and more exacting than anyone realized.

Jo Robinson is a New York Times bestselling writer. To purchase her 128-page book, *Why Grassfed Is Best!* go to www.eatwild.com.