FACT SHEET: Grass-finished Beef

What is Grass- finished Beef?	Grass-finished beef (sometimes marketed as grass-fed beef) comes from cattle that have been raised on a forage diet their entire lives. While most cattle spend the majority of their lives in pastures eating grass before moving to a feedlot for grain-finishing, grass-finished beef cattle remain on a pasture and forage diet.
Grass-finished Beef Production	Producing grass-finished beef in large volumes is difficult in North America where few regions have the growing season to make it possible. Most grass-finished beef is imported from Australia and New Zealand where grass is in greater abundance than feed corn and grows year-round. • Suitable types of grass for grazing can include bluegrass, orchardgrass, bromegrass, tall fescue and, in some situations, alfalfa. • Hay, haylage, baleage, silage, ensilage and post-harvest crop residue without separated grain may be included in some producers' feeding regimes. • Most cattle go to market weighing between 1,000 and 1,250 pounds, which may take longer for grass-finished animals to achieve than grain-fed beef cattle. In 2006, USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) proposed a standard for grass (forage) fed marketing claims. The proposal calls for producers to demonstrate 99 percent or more of their animals' energy came from grass and/or forage, with the exception of milk consumed by animals prior to weaning. • Forage is defined as any edible, non-woody plant material, other than separated grain, which can be grazed or harvested for feeding. • An AMS-verified claim of grass (forage) fed is not the same as a claim of organic or freerange. These claims require additional standards and verification. • AMS is reviewing comments received in response to its proposal in order to define a U.S. standard grass (forage) fed claim.
Process Verified Beef Programs	Beef producers wishing to make marketing claims associated with what their animals are fed or how their animals are raised must submit a documented quality manual to USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Once AMS approves the supplier's quality management program, the program is then "USDA Process Verified." Process claims such as "free-range," "pasture-raised" and "grass-finished" must be approved by USDA FSIS before they can be used on a beef product label.
Nutritional Value of Grass-finished Beef	 All beef is nutrient-rich, with eight times more vitamin B₁₂, six times more zinc, and three times more iron than skinless chicken breast. There are 29 cuts of beef that meet government guidelines for lean, like the tenderloin, sirloin and 95% lean ground beef. One 3.5-ounce serving of grass-finished beef offers 15 milligrams more omega-3 than other kinds of beef. However, in general, beef is not considered a primary source of omega-3 fatty acids. While grass-finished beef can contain more conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) than other kinds of beef, research has not determined whether this difference results in a more significant health benefit. Health professionals believe CLA, a polyunsaturated fatty acid, has cancer fighting properties. Grass-finished beef provides 4 percent of the Daily Value for Vitamin E compared to 1.5 percent for grain-fed beef. Vitamin E-rich foods such as almonds provide 24 percent of the Daily Value for Vitamin E.
Taste of Grass- Finished Beef	Compared to grain-fed beef, grass-finished products are often described as having a distinctively different taste. • Grass-finished beef industry sources say that grass-finished beef may benefit from alternative preparation methods, including marinades and shorter cooking times. • In a series of taste panels conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, consumers rated domestic grain-fed beef significantly higher than Australian grass-finished beef for desirability of flavor, tenderness and overall acceptability. However, this research also found that consumers who preferred the Australian grass-finished beef were willing to pay more money for the product.
Safety and Inspection	Like all beef, grass-finished products go through a rigorous inspection process and are subject to strict government guidelines to ensure the highest level of safety. All cattle are inspected by a public health veterinarian before entering the packing plant and those with any signs of illness are not allowed into the food supply.

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