



Know Your Meats

Did you know that 70% of antibiotics used in the U.S. are added to the feed of livestock and poultry that are not sick? The problem is that cows, pigs, lamb and poultry are not meant to eat a diet made up primarily of corn and soy. Specifically, when corn is fed to cows it weakens their immune system because it causes severe indigestion. As Marion Nestle notes, “The digestive system of cows and sheep are set up to handle grass. The rumen stomach works like a fermentation vat; it contains vast numbers of bacteria that convert chewed-up grass and hay into nutrients (something we cannot do). The animals use these nutrients to grow and make meat. Ruminants are not meant to handle the more concentrated fats, proteins and carbohydrates in soybeans and corn. Eating concentrated feed made from corn and soybeans makes cattle grow faster and fatter, but it alters the mix of bacteria in their rumens. This gives them the equivalent of cow indigestion; the animals are not as healthy and need antibiotic treatment more frequently.” (Marion Nestle, Food Politics). Similarly, chickens are meant to be wandering around eating grubs and worms and some grain. Often, they are raised in crowded conditions on an all-grain diet and given antibiotics because there are so many diseases in the big chicken coops.

Excessive hormone use is another problem in the raising of cows and lamb. Hormones are used as growth promoters in cattle and sheep. Most beef calves in the U.S. today go from 80-1,200 lbs. in about 14 months. Hormone use in animals has been shown to cause cancer, while antibiotic use in animals increases the number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria and weakens our immune system.

So, it is important to know where your meat is coming from, and to read the labels!

- 0. Natural means no preservatives or additives were introduced after the meat or poultry was processed. Natural meat could still have been produced with industrial methods, in crowded conditions, given antibiotics and hormones, and slaughtered in unsanitary factory conditions.
- 0. Certified Humane guarantees that animals have freedom and prohibits crates and tie-down in stalls, as well as artificial means to induce growth. So, animals are not given antibiotics or hormones, but they are still given non-organic feed which most likely contains genetically modified corn and soy.
- 0. Certified Organic means that all feed is vegetarian and certified organic (including pastureland) which means that it is not treated with pesticides or herbicides and cannot be genetically modified. Animals have access to pasture, sun and enough land for exercise, and grazing is done in a way that doesn't degrade the land. Also organic standards prohibit the use of antibiotics or hormones (hormone use in poultry and pork production has been banned since 1959).
- 0. Grass-fed animals eat nothing but their mother's milk, grass and cut hay.
- 0. Grain-finished animals graze until they reach a certain weight, then are sent to feedlots where they are “finished” on grain diets. If the label says, fed an all-vegetarian diet, it usually means that they have been fed a diet of organic grain.

When you eat meat, you should choose free-range poultry and pasture-raised beef, lamb or pork, which is raised without antibiotics and/or hormones.

For more information, check out:

What To Eat, Marion Nestle PhD.

The Omnivore's Dilemma, Michael Pollan

In Defense of Food, Michael Polla