



[Is Grass-Fed Beef Worth the Money?](#)

In the recent post about [best and worst protein supplements](#), a reader asked me whether I thought grass-fed whey was worth the money, and I answered in the negative. There's a larger question: is grass-fed beef worth the money? Grass-fed anything?

Why grass-fed whey protein is not worth extra money

Grass-fed animals, cows in this case, produce meat and milk that has a different fatty acid profile from animals that are grain-fed. In particular, omega-6 fatty acids are lower, and omega-3 fatty acids are higher; this is a much more beneficial fatty acid profile than from grain-fed animals.

So, if it's more beneficial for health, what's the problem with grass-fed whey? Whey has virtually no fat in it; it's pure protein. You end up paying a lot of extra money for no benefit.

It's a typical health food scam, IMO.

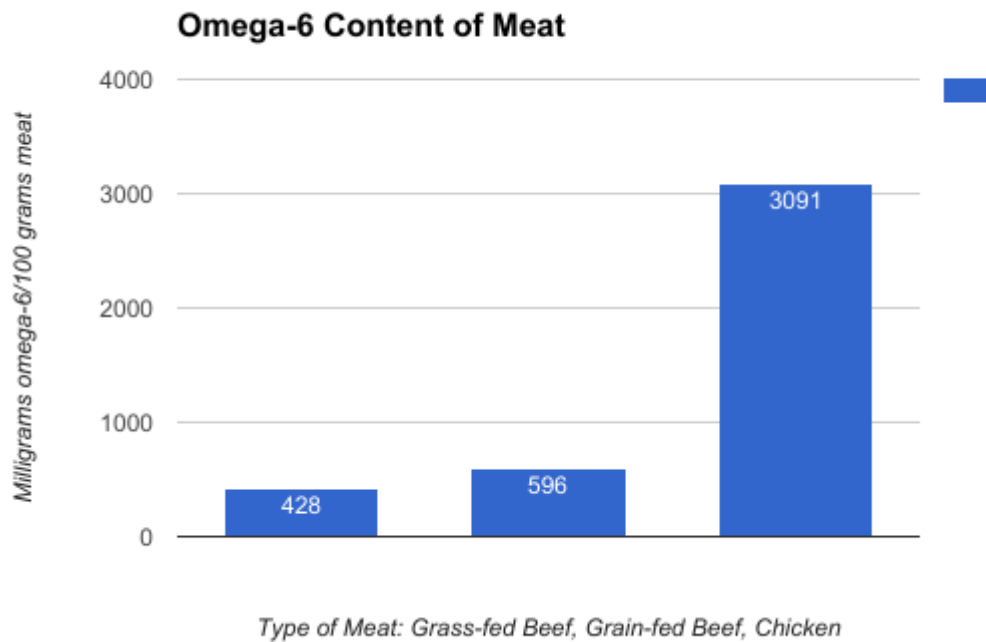
Grass-fed beef

Grass-fed beef, as noted above, contains lower levels of omega-6 fatty acids. These are the same types of polyunsaturated fats found in vegetable oils and that raise inflammation. An unbalanced ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 may lie behind many chronic diseases; our paleolithic ancestors may have had a 1: 1 ratio; in the modern world, we may have 15:1 or higher. Decreasing omega-6 fats is definitely a good thing.

So why do I question whether grass-fed beef, with lower omega-6 fatty acids, is worth it? Don't we want to be healthy?

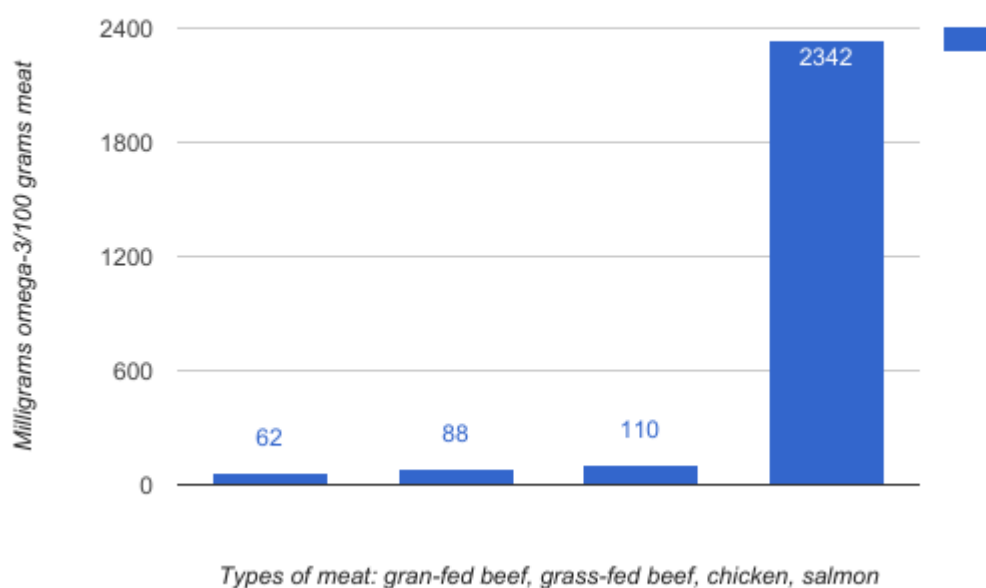
To answer that, check out the graph I made, below. It shows the content of

omega-6 fats in grass-fed beef, grain-fed beef, and chicken. Data are from [Self Nutrition Data](#).



The type of beef used in the chart is ground, 70% lean, per 100 grams (just under 1/4 pound) of meat. Grass-fed beef has about 28% less omega-6 than grain-fed. Chicken has a whopping 6 to 7-fold more than either of them.

Now let's look at omega-3 fats, the beneficial fat that most people don't get enough of. For comparison, I've added salmon to the graph.



Grass-fed beef has more omega-3 than grain-fed, but it's dwarfed by salmon.

What can we conclude from this?

If you eat chicken with any frequency, say once a week, grass-fed beef will not decrease the amount of omega-6 fats that you consume. The chicken in your diet will overwhelm any decrease in omega-6 from eating grass-fed beef.

If you eat any salmon at all – and this is generally true for eating any type of fatty fish – you would get a far greater amount of omega-3 fats than from grass-fed beef.

Using [the Pareto principle](#), that 20% of the inputs yield 80% of the benefits, you'd be better off giving up chicken and eating salmon regularly, say once or twice a week. Furthermore, a teaspoon of cod liver oil has about 1000 mg of omega-3 fats; since I don't eat fish regularly, I [supplement with fish oil](#).

If you eat no chicken – and importantly, eat nothing made with vegetable oil – and you eat fish regularly, and you have a lot of cash, then go ahead and buy the grass-fed beef. Otherwise, as I've shown above, you'd be better off making the other changes I noted.

Eating grass-fed beef is like a man with a pot belly trying to improve his attractiveness by buying a sports car. While a sports car improves his attractiveness, he'd be better off getting rid of his belly first before he goes and blows a bunch of money on a car.

Hormones and Antibiotics

Added: Some people object (here and on Twitter) that grass-fed beef contains less or no antibiotics and hormones.

Regarding antibiotics: [Antibiotic residue testing in meat results in few positive samples](#). Upshot: antibiotics are rapidly metabolized, and animals must go through [a withdrawal period](#) before slaughter. Unacceptable levels of antibiotics are found in less than 1% of inspected meat.

Regarding hormones, most foods have much larger amounts of estrogens than beef. See table below – [link](#).

Table 1. Estrogenic activity of common foods (ng/3 oz serving)¹

Food	Estrogenic Activity
Soy flour (defatted)	128,423,201
Tofu	19,306,004
Pinto beans	153,087
White bread	51,029
Peanuts	17,010
Eggs	94
Milk	5.4
Beef from implanted steer	1.2
Beef from non-implanted steer	.85

¹Units are nanograms of estrone plus estradiol for animal products and isoflavins for plant products per 3 oz of food.

Hoffman and Eversol (1986), Hartman et al. (1998), Shore and Shemesh (2003), USDA-ARS (2002). Adapted from: Loy, 2011

To my mind, the same principles apply as for fatty acids. The value added from a much more expensive product isn't worth it, not to me anyway.

PS: Check out my books, [Dumping Iron](#), [Muscle Up](#), and [Stop the Clock](#).

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