

Nutritional Value of Organic vs. Conventional Beef

BROOKINGS, S.D. - Natural and organic beef market share has been increasing over the past few decades. In 2010, the natural and organic beef market share was at 1.6 percent. In April 2014, the USDA Economic Research Service indicated organic sales accounted for more than 4 percent of U.S. food sales. Focusing on the organic and natural beef share of the total beef dollar, the National Cattlemen's Beef Board reported that natural and organic beef had 6.3 percent share for the fourth quarter of 2014 with conventional beef market share at 93.7 percent. What is the difference between organic and natural programs?

"Organic production requires producers to manage livestock to meet both animal health and welfare standards," explained Julie Walker, SDSU Extension Beef Specialist SDSU Associate Professor. While vaccinations are allowed, Walker said antibiotics or growth hormones are not permitted. "Animals should be fed only 100 percent organic feedstuffs and should be allowed access to the outdoors," Walker said.

Organic producers work with certifying agents who ensure USDA organic products meet or exceed all organic standards. The USDA definition of natural is focused on the beef product, and states that natural beef should contain no artificial ingredients or added colors and can only be minimally processed. "There are other voluntary programs related to how the animal is raised such as 'naturally raised'. These programs may have animal management requirements including no antibiotics, no growth promotants, no animal byproducts, and third-party verification of management practices," said Amanda Blair, SDSU Extension Meat Science Specialist SDSU Associate Professor.

What's driving consumers?

Purchase drivers for selecting organic foods can be divided in two categories: 1) healthier choice and 2) socially conscious reasons. A 3-ounce lean beef serving provides: 51% of the Daily Value (DV) for protein 37% DV for vitamin B12 38% DV for zinc 14% DV for iron "The production system whether conventional or organic does not change the nutrients contained in a 3-ounce beef serving," Walker said.

She explained that conventionally-produced beef may have been implanted with growth promotants, however, according to numerous research studies, beef from non-implanted steers had 5 ng/500 g of estrogenic activity compared to implanted steers which had 7 ng/500 g. For reference, one pound equals 454 g.

"Consumers may prefer a specific production system for the beef they want to consume. However, it is important to remember that all production systems provide consumers with safe product selections, and that the nutrient content of beef is similar across the different production systems organic, natural, or conventional," Walker said. "It is important to remember, that regardless of the production system, consumers are assured a safe wholesome product with similar nutrient content."

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