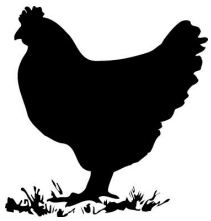
The Nutritional Benefits of Pasture-Raised Meat Birds

Birds on pasture = better meat

The majority of chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese that are raised for meat are kept inside in confined conditions and eat a diet consisting primarily of grain. Birds raised outdoors on pasture eat green plants, insects, and small animals, in addition to being fed grit and grain. They are exposed to sunshine and are able to forage, run, jump and peck. This results in healthier animals … and more nutritious food for people as well.



Studies show the nutritional value of meat from pastured poultry that consume grass and forage is higher than meat from conventionally-raised birds.

Better Fat Quality

Less saturated fat, more heart-healthy polyunsaturated fats

- Replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats is associated with reduced blood levels of total and LDL cholesterol.
- Studies suggest that replacement reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attacks, and related deaths.

Lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 polyunsaturated fats

- Omega-6 fats are considered more inflammatory than omega-3 fats.
- Research suggests a lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats may improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Increase in Protein

Higher levels of protein and collagen

- Protein is needed to build, maintain, and repair tissue.
- Collagen is a type of protein that can reduce joint pain and improve athletic performance.

By the numbers...

Compared to conventionally-raised poultry meat, pasture-raised poultry meat has:

- 2.3x more omega-3 fats
- 90% lower omega-6: omega-3 ratio
- 1.9x higher poly-unsaturated: saturated fats
- 6% higher protein
- 15% more collagen

The how & why

Forages are the edible parts of plants other than grain and include pasture vegetation and grasses. They are good sources of beneficial omega-3 fats.

In contrast, grains such as corn are dominated by more inflammatory omega-6 fats. Due to the way poultry digest their food, the beneficial fat and nutrients in the pasture are absorbed relatively unchanged before they are incorporated into the meat. When it comes to chicken, turkey, duck and goose meat, **"you are what you eat!"**

In addition, meat birds that live most or all of their lives outside on pasture exercise more than birds do in confinement. This factor likely contributes to muscle development and results in higher protein and collagen content.

Shopping for poultry meat

"Free-range" implies that the birds were raised outdoors. However, under USDA labeling laws, this is not always the case as animals only have to be allowed access to outdoors with no provision for how much time or space must be allowed outside. This may mean access only through a "pop hole" with no full-body entry to the outdoors.

"Pasture-raised" suggests pasture was included in the bird's diet. However, there is no standard diet requirement and no definition of pasture under this claim.

Because these claims are not 100% reliable or tightly regulated, look for third party verified labels, or a local farm that uses humane practices but may not be certified due to the costs involved. Learn more at: **foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels**

The Bottom Line

Pasture-raised animals produce nutritionally superior food for people. In addition to the nutritional advantages, there are many animal welfare and environmental benefits associated with pasture-based animal agriculture. Please consider supporting your local family farmers who raise their animals humanely on grass and well-managed pasture.

FACT

Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) *is a national nonprofit organization that promotes the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs. FACT offers grants, scholarships, webinars and a mentorship program for livestock and poultry farmers who wish to raise their animals on pasture.*

www.FoodAnimalConcernsTrust.org