The Guide to Grassfed Grazing
Featuring the basics about understanding the benefits of grassfed and how to start a Buyer’s Club.
Edible Fall Grassfed

It's more important than ever to choose the sustainable (and healthy) meat with high levels of CLA, lower occurrences of E. coli bacteria, and no risk of carrying bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease. For more information on the health benefits of grassfed products, see eatwild.com

Good for You

Compared to products from primarily grain-fed animals, products from grassfed animals—meat, poultry, milk, yogurt, cheese and eggs—have been demonstrated to have a number of health benefits:
- Less fat
- Fewer calories
- More omega-3 fatty acids
- More conjugated linoleic acid (CLA)
- More beta carotene
- Lower occurrence of E. coli bacteria

Increased levels of CLA and omega-3 fatty acids have been linked to decreased risks of cancer, diabetes, some types of immune system disorders and cardiovascular disease. Lowering fat and calories can have a positive impact on cardiovascular health and obesity. Increased vitamin A, through beta-carotene, helps maintain healthy skin and vision. Additional health benefits add up when animals are raised without growth hormones, antibiotics or pesticides. Animals raised on pasture, without any animal products in their diet, have a much lower risk of carrying E. coli and no risk of carrying bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), also known as mad cow disease. For more information on the health benefits of grassfed products, see eatwild.com

Good for the Planet

Grass-based systems are the most sustainable type of animal agriculture. Industrial livestock farming relies on growing grain for animal feed, which is typically produced in farming systems that rely heavily on soil-eroding tillage and fossil-fuel-based fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. It also confines large numbers of animals in small spaces, which can lead to manure leaking into groundwater and running off into nearby waterways.

In contrast, grass-based systems maintain plant cover on pastures, reducing or eliminating erosion and runoff. Methods like rotational grazing, where grass-eating animals are frequently moved to new pastures, allow fields to “rest,” build pasture organic matter and the “good” microbes that build healthy soil. Deeply rooted pasture grasses also draw carbon from the air down into the soil via photosynthesis, helping to offset carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to climate change. Grazing, and healthy soils in general, is a critical tool for helping to cool our warming planet!

Good for Farms

Farmers face a host of challenges, from competition in a globalized marketplace to increasingly erratic weather. The number of small, family-run farms, a cherished part of our Chesapeake Bay regional landscape, has seriously declined over the past three decades. Well-managed pasture helps improve farm profitability: healthy soils are more drought- and flood-tolerant and are higher in the nutrients needed to produce more forage for grazing animals.

Another key element of sustainable farms is you, the consumer. Your food purchases can have a big impact on the landscape around you, connecting you to your neighboring farmers and contributing to a vibrant local food economy. When you go grassfed you are preserving our region’s agrarian heritage, keeping working lands working and helping farmers thrive and provide fresh, nutritious food to our communities.

So How to Go Grassfed?

Local farmers are increasingly choosing to raise their livestock outdoors, on pasture, where the animals can browse freely. However, many factors affect whether a farm chooses to raise its ruminants on 100% grass or to include some grain in the diet. The simplest way to find out if an animal’s diet is primarily grass-based is to connect directly with a farmer. Visit futureharvestcasa.org to view the Amazing Grazing Directory, a resource for identifying and connecting with Chesapeake region farmers.

Use this directory to help find local sources for steaks, ground beef, leg of lamb, sausage, bacon, eggs, smoked hams, handmade cheese and even goat-milk fudge, Thanksgiving turkeys, Christmas geese and more—all fresh from the pasture and direct from the farmer to you. All the farms in this directory report their animals’ diets are primarily grass-based.

Go to Farmers Markets

Farmers markets offer the opportunity to speak directly with local farmers who produce your food. Farmers markets offer a high degree of choice, often including multiple producers of a variety of meats, dairy and poultry products, and the opportunity to select exactly the cuts of meat you want. And while you’re there, you can pick up fresh vegetables, fruits and other market essentials. Find a market near you with these guides:
- Maryland Farmers Market Association
- Buy Local Delaware: Farmers’ Markets Guide
- Virginia Farmers Market Association
- West Virginia Farmers Market Association
- Washington Post Guide to Farmers Markets in the Washington DC area

Buy a CSA Share

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) harvest subscription programs

Eat less meat. Eat only local grassfed.

That’s the best for your wallet, your planet, your health, and your farmers—it’s the best tasting too!

Dena Leibman Executive Director of Future Harvest CASA

Can an eating meat actually help the planet? These days that might sound counterintuitive, but raising animals on pasture can help curb climate change and improve water quality, helping to protect our environment and the Chesapeake Bay. And even better? Locally purchased grassfed products are nutritious and support your neighboring farms. As meat consumption reaches record levels, it’s more important than ever to choose the sustainable (and healthy) option: grassfed.
originated on vegetable farms, but more and more meat producers are offering options for consumers. In a CSA arrangement, a set amount of meat is paid for upfront by the consumer. This guarantees the producer a secure amount of income and benefits you with a supply of delicious meats over several months. CSAs may offer weekly, biweekly or monthly pickups, reducing your need for storage space. Meat is generally cut up into steaks, roasts, stew and ground meat, wrapped or vacuum-packed, and labeled. Farms sometimes offer “packages” of choice cuts of meat for those who just want an assortment of steaks and roasts.

Join or Start a Buying Club
Buying clubs are cooperative groups of people seeking to share a bulk purchase of whole, half or quarter animals. Why go bulk? Buying in quantity can be cheaper overall, save you trips to the grocery store, ensure you have meat on hand for longer periods and give you the chance to cook and enjoy a variety of meat cuts. Further, a buying club can connect you to like-minded people and introduce you to the grazers who grow your food.

More citations for health:
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2846864/
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REnard TURNer, vanguard ranch

In Washington DC in the 1970s, Renard and Chinette Turner considered themselves part of a circle of “back-to-the-landers” and began researching and learning everything they could about agriculture, later moving to Gordonsville, Virginia and starting their farm. Vanguard Ranch’s mission to provide fresh and healthy food, straight from the source, begins with breeding and nurturing their goats, free ranging them on more than 50 acres of pasture. The Turners believe in self-sufficiency, in living closer to the land, and in agriculture and food as a center of connectivity in communities. Seeing how goat meat is loved by many cultures and becoming an American favorite, Turner grows and manages his product from field to plate, direct marketing goat curry, kabobs, and burgers by traveling to fairs, festivals, and events with their food truck, Vanguard Ranch Natural Gourmet. Learn more about Vanguard Ranch at vanguard-ranch-natural-gourmet.ueniweb.com
The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report that was released on August 8, 2019 says, “Balanced diets, featuring plant-based foods, such as those based on coarse grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and animal-sourced food produced in resilient, sustainable and low-GHG emission systems, present major opportunities for adaptation and mitigation while generating significant co-benefits in terms of human health.”

– Page B6.2 of the Summary for Policy Makers

Find local grassfed sources from the Amazing Grazing sourcebook at:
futureharvestcasa.org/resources/amazinggrazing-directory

How to Start a Buying Club

Want to start a Go Grassfed buying club? The following guide will help you create your own.

Learn the Landscape
Every buying club needs a leader who knows the basics.

- Find out what’s available in your area. Use the Amazing Grazing directory to find the farms near you. Reach out to the farmers to see if their offerings fit with your needs and expectations. Some may sell whole and half animals regularly, and fit right into your buying club model. (View the Amazing Grazing directory at www.futureharvestcasa.org).
- Learn what types of animals are available wholesale. Do you want lamb and pork, or prefer beef? Can you find one farm with all the meats you’re interested in, or will you need to work with multiple farmers? Some farmers have different species available seasonally; others have multiple processing dates and have animals available year-round. Farmers typically sell whole, half and quarter animals.
- Learn which types of cuts are available. The types of cuts and numbers of those cuts available differ from species to species. Each animal yields only so many types of cuts, and the proportion will change depending on if you want to purchase a whole, half or quarter. Since a single cow yields only so many steaks, you’ll have the opportunity to cook new and varied cuts of meat. If you want to make a bulk purchase, consider asking for a “variety pack,” “sampler pack” or a “farmer’s choice.”
- Understand the “cut sheet.” Farmers and butchers use cut sheets to divide up the parts of an animal into the end products. A certain percentage of a cow will always be ground beef, but the buyer (you!) might prefer a chuck roast over cubed stew meat, or as many T-bone steaks as possible. The farmer might ask your buying club to fill out the “cut sheet,” might provide you with a pre-filled sheet for editing, or might already have a standard set of cuts. Learn more about cut sheets, different cuts of meat and how to cook them here: LINK to a cut guide
- Learn the freezer space requirement. Buying club members would need for quarters, halves or whole animals. The rule of thumb is one cubic foot of freezer space for every 35–40 pounds of packaged meat. Will one person store all of the meat, or will each participant have enough freezer space?
- Ask your farmer the price range for quarters, halves and wholes, and be prepared to share this with potential members. Bulk meat pricing varies based on the type of animal, production practices and from animal to animal. When selling an entire animal, farmers typically price the meat one of three ways: a standard price per whole animal; a set price per pound for the carcass/hanging weight; or a set price per pound per final product weight. You may want to calculate the approximate price per pound; ask your farmer for guidance and visit LINK to pricing for a more detailed explanation of wholesale pricing.

Recruit Members
Now that you have learned the basics of bulk buying, it’s time to recruit members. Consider how many members you want to engage in the buying club, then recruit from family and friends, via social media and email and by posting on neighborhood and regional forums like nextdoor.com. Lay out the options: what types of meat are available and when; which cuts buyers can expect; and in what quantities; and a rough idea of cost and freezer storage requirements. Will you split the cuts and costs evenly? If certain members plan on purchasing a greater proportion of the animal, what process will you use to allocate the meat? Determine your process ahead of time.

Pick Up
With your club formed, place your order! Your farmer may deliver or you may need to pick up your bulk purchase from the farmer or the butcher. Plan to bring enough coolers to transport your meat home to your freezer. After pickup, meat should be stored in a freezer until you are ready to cook individual cuts.

Let’s Eat!
Now it’s time to enjoy your delicious bounty! Grassfed meats are leaner and cook differently than grain-fed meats. Encourage all club members to purchase a meat thermometer to use to cook grassfed meats to perfection. Learn more about grassfed meat cooking techniques and recipes below—bon appetit!

- www.americangrassfed.org/recipes
- www.onlygrassfed.com/cooking-tips/recipes.html

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- www.onlygrassfed.com/cooking-tips/recipes.html
Building a sustainable foodshed from farm and fishery to table

Future Harvest CASA’s mission is to provide education, networking, and advocacy to help build a sustainable Chesapeake foodshed, where food flows from farm and fishery to table in ways that strengthen farming and the regional food economy; protect our land, water, and air; and provide healthy, nutritious food that sustains the region’s communities and cities.

We enlist farmers, chefs, and other foodshed actors who grow and source food sustainably to lead our peer-to-peer education programming through our Field School. We advocate for policies that help small farmers succeed as well as a resilient regional food economy, and policies that protect the environment and communities. And our network of partner foodshed-focused organizations and businesses have a similar approach, and share information and engage in lively debates to build resilience in our regional food system.

The “Go Grassfed” campaign is a USDA grant funded project designed to boost demand for local, grassfed meat, dairy and other pasture-based projects in the Chesapeake Region. Future Harvest CASA is working in collaboration with grant partners Mountains-2-Bay Grazing Alliance, Central Farm Markets, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Edible DC, Maryland and Virginia Extensions, the Maryland Farmers Market Association, and many grazers to conduct this robust multi-media, multi-year effort.

For more information go to www.futureharvestcasa.org/grant-funds-awarded-go-grass-fed-campaign