
How to Choose Sustainable Animal Protein

Smart animal protein choices can fit into a healthy and sustainable diet. Sustainable selections may improve your health, protect the environment, and promote safe and ethical treatment of animals and workers. Large scale animal production requires many inputs, such as land, water, and drugs. It produces many outputs such as sewage, antibiotic resistant bugs, and greenhouse gases. Your animal protein choices have an impact on the environment. For consumers, it is the most expensive protein. Eating less animal protein reduces overall environmental and consumer costs.

How Much Protein Do You Need?

The average man needs 56 grams and an average woman needs 46 grams each day. This is a 2-3 ounce serving of protein or the size of a deck of cards twice a day. Most Americans eat double that amount.

Less is More

- **Eat less meat and dairy.** Cut back on portions. Combine smaller portions with plant proteins, vegetables and grains. Pasta dishes, stir fry meals and burritos are examples.
- **Go “meatless”** one or more days per week. Choose vegetarian meals on a regular basis. Entrée salads or rice/quinoa dishes made with beans and cheese or a peanut butter and fruit spread sandwich are examples.
- **Combine with plant protein.** Combine legumes, nuts and soy with meat to enjoy the meat flavor while eating less. Soups, chili, burgers, and casseroles are examples.
- **Select more responsibly raised meats** and reduce use of processed and/or precooked meats, such as luncheon meats and processed breaded chicken products.

Limit Waste

- **Plan for your needs.** Buy “just right” amounts.

- **Freeze small portions.** Place in a freezer bag or airtight container. Date your meat and place the oldest meat in the front of the freezer to use first. Thaw your meat in the refrigerator to prevent bacteria growth.
- **Use meat in multiple meals.** Plan to use leftover meats for several meals. For example, a whole chicken can first be used roasted. The next day use some chicken pieces in a salad or sandwich. Then on another day, make a chicken and vegetable or rice soup using the bones and skin for a rich stock and adding the bits and pieces to the final soup.

Protein Scorecard

- Plant based proteins (beans, nuts, grains) cost less and are more sustainable. Eggs, fish, poultry, and pork are moderate in cost and have a moderate impact on the environment. Dairy, beef, lamb, and goat are the least sustainable protein choices.

	FOOD	IMPACT (GHG emissions per gram of protein)	COST (Retail price per gram of protein)
LOW	Wheat		\$
	Corn		\$
	Beans, chickpeas, lentils		\$
	Rice		\$
	Fish		\$\$\$
	Soy		\$
	Nuts		\$\$\$
	Eggs		\$\$
MEDIUM	Poultry		\$\$
	Pork		\$\$
	Dairy (milk, cheese)		\$\$
HIGH	Beef		\$\$\$
	Lamb & goat		\$\$\$



Understand the Label

To help you use your food dollars wisely, learn how to support healthy animal farming practices. The label terms below will help you know if the meats you are buying are responsibly raised.

The labels below, with these seals are claims that are verified:



Animals raised on 100% Organic, no animal by-products or genetically modified (GM) feed, with no antibiotics and hormones and living conditions accommodate natural behavior.



Antibiotics used for therapeutic purposes only, no hormones ever, with humane livestock handling.



Diet is natural forage, no antibiotics and hormones ever, living conditions are pasture-raised with no confinement, animals are USA born and raised.



Chicken only: Certified Responsible Antibiotic Use (CRAU) Antibiotics may be used to treat sick broiler chickens as prescribed by a veterinarian.



No genetically modified (GM) livestock; No GM feed.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) allows the following label claims. There is no verification process and definitions are company specific.

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- **No Antibiotics Ever (NAE)**
 - **Raised Without Antibiotics, No Antibiotics Administered, No Added Antibiotics:** usually means no antibiotics used to promote growth, or antibiotics only used to treat and prevent illness. May mean no antibiotics used that are important for humans as defined by the World Health Organization.
 - **Grass Fed:** for Beef, Bison, Goat, Lamb, Sheep: animals forage.
 - **No Hormones** (for beef and lamb only): means no added hormones used in raising the animals. Hormones are never allowed for pork or poultry.
 - **Free Range or Free Roaming Chicken:** means birds are allowed outside, there is no set amount of time or size of space required.
 - **Natural:** means no artificial ingredients, additives or added colors and items are minimally processed. Not considered a verifiable claim.

Purchase from trusted sources:

- Ask for information on the use of drugs, farming and slaughtering practices from your meat supplier.
- Listing of Approved USDA Process Verified Programs

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Official%20ListingPVP.pdf>