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Super Natural Milk

By Jo Robinson

Most cartons of milk in the supermarket show a picture of cows contentedly grazing on grass. In reality, 85 to 95 percent of the cows in the United States are now being raised in confinement, not on pasture. The grass they eat comes in the form of hay, and the ground that they stand on is a blend of dirt and manure.

The reason for confining cows in feedlots and feeding them grain rather than grass is that they produce far more milk under these unnatural conditions. If you also inject them with bi-weekly hormones, standard practice in the dairy industry, they produce even more. Milk them three times a day instead of two and you have the tried and true formula for today's Super Producers. On average, cows raised in confinement produce more than three times as much milk as the family cow of days gone by and 15 times the amount required to raise a healthy calf.

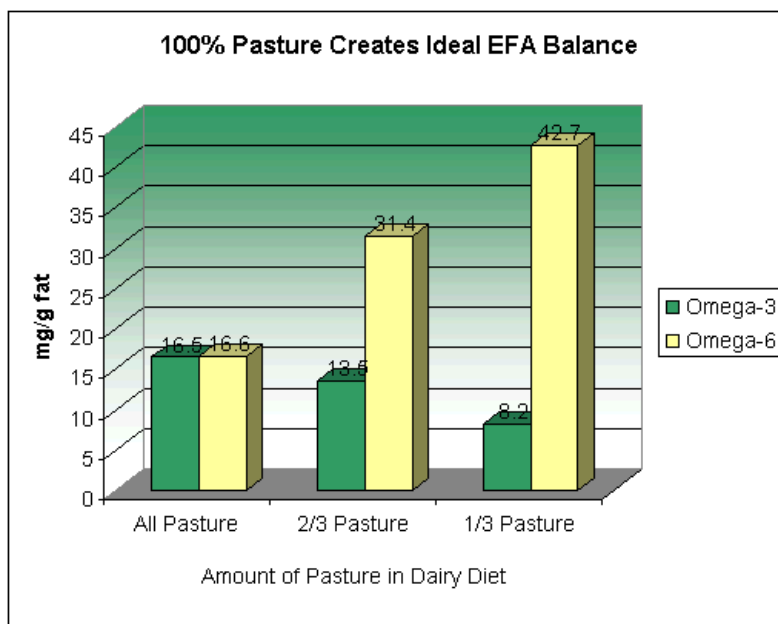
But with so much emphasis on quantity, the nutritional content of our milk has suffered. One of the biggest losses has been in its CLA content. CLA, or "conjugated linoleic acid," is a type of fat that may prove to be one of our most potent cancer fighters. Milk from a pastured cow has up to five times more CLA than milk from a grain-fed cow. To date, most of the proof of the health benefits of CLA has come from test tube or animal studies. But a few human studies have produced encouraging results. For example, French researchers compared CLA levels in the breast tissues of 360 women. The women with the most CLA in their tissue (and thus the most CLA in their diets) had a 74 percent lower risk of breast cancer than the women with the least CLA [1]. If an American woman were to switch from grain-fed to grass-fed dairy products, she would have CLA levels similar to the women in the study who had the lowest rate of cancer.

Milk from pastured cows also contains an ideal ratio of essential fatty acids or EFAs. There are two families of EFAs—omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids. Studies suggest that if your diet contains roughly equal amounts of these two fats, you will have a lower risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disorders, allergies, obesity, diabetes, dementia, and various other mental disorders.[2]

Take a few moments to study the chart below showing EFA levels in milk from cows fed varying amounts of grass and grain.[3] The green bars represent omega-3 fatty acids, and the yellow bars represent omega-6 fatty acids. As you can see, when a cow is raised on pasture (represented by the two bars on the far left), her milk has an ideal, one-to-one ratio of EFAs.

Take away one-third of the grass and replace it with grain or other supplements (represented by the two bars in the middle) and the omega-3 content of the milk goes down while the omega-6 content goes up, upsetting an essential balance.

Replace two-thirds of the pasture with a grain-based diet (illustrated by the two bars on the far right) and the milk has a very top-heavy ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids. This ratio has been linked with an increased risk of a wide variety of conditions, including obesity, diabetes, depression, and cancer. Much of the milk you buy in the supermarket has an even more lopsided ratio than this because the cows never graze on pasture.



Milk from pastured cows offers additional health benefits. (I'm beginning to sound like a TV infomercial: "But wait! There's more!") Besides giving you five times more CLA and an ideal balance of EFAs, grass-fed milk is higher in beta-carotene, vitamin A, and vitamin E. This vitamin bonus comes, in part, from the fact that fresh pasture has more of these nutrients than grain or hay. (When grass is dried and turned into hay, it loses a significant amount of its vitamin content.) These extra helpings of vitamins are then transferred to the cow's milk.



The Home Creamery



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Don't Over-Do It!		
Ideal internal temperatures (Fahrenheit) for cooking reliably-sourced grassfed and pastured meats:		
Meat	Suggested Temperatures for Grassfed Meat	USDA Recommended Temperatures
Beef & Bison	120-140°	145-170°
Ground Meat	160°	160°
Pork	125-155°	145-170°
Lamb and Goat	120-145°	145-170°
Poultry	145-160°	160-170°
Chicken (unstuffed)	165°	165°
Turkey (unstuffed)	165°	165°



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There's another factor as well. As I mentioned, a cow raised on pasture produces far less milk than a cow raised in a confinement dairy on a grain-based diet. This is a bane for the farmer but a blessing for the consumer. The less milk a cow produces, the more vitamins in her milk.^[4] This is because a cow has a set amount of vitamins to transfer to her milk, and if she's bred, fed, and injected to be a Super Producer, her milk has fewer vitamins per glass. It's a watered down version of the real thing.

Oh, I almost forgot the best part of all. Dairy products from grass-fed cows taste delicious, and they have a rich yellow color that is visible proof of their bonus supply of carotenes. Serve cheese or butter from a grass-based dairy, and everyone will notice the difference. Also, your cookies and cakes will have that rich buttery color that hasn't been seen since Great-Grandma's day. (You do bake, don't you?)

So where can you find milk from pastured cows? All of the dairies listed on www.eatwild.com keep their cows outdoors on grass whenever possible. Some farmers supplement their cows with small amounts of grain; if so, their listing will detail the type and amount. To find your local producer, go to our [list of grass-fed suppliers](#) and click on your state. **We also have a special section devoted to farmers who feed their cows 100 percent forage-based diets.**

Expect to pay more for this high-quality milk from humanely treated cows. The main reason is the low volume of milk per cow. In order to make a living, pasture-based dairy farmers must get a premium price for their premium milk.

Got grass-fed milk?

Jo Robinson is a New York Times bestselling writer. She is the author or coauthor of 11 nationally published books including [Pasture Perfect](#), a comprehensive overview of the benefits of choosing products from pasture-raised animals, and [The Omega Diet](#) (with Dr. Artemis Simopoulos) the healthiest diet of all Mediterranean diets. To order Jo's books or learn more about grass-fed products, visit <http://eatwild.com>.

[1]Bougnoux, *et al.*, *Inform*, 10:S43, 1999.

[2] For more information about essential fatty acid balance, read [The Omega Diet](#). The book provides 24 pages of pertinent scientific references.

[3] The data comes from: Dhiman, T. R., G. R. Anand, *et al.* (1999). "Conjugated linoleic acid content of milk from cows fed different diets." *J Dairy Sci* 82(10): 2146-56.

[4] Jensen, S. K., A. K. Johannsen, *et al.* (1999). "Quantitative secretion and maximal secretion capacity of retinol, beta-carotene and alpha-tocopherol into cows' milk." *J Dairy Res* 66(4): 511-22.

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