

MYTHS ABOUT BEEF PRODUCTION

MYTH:

Antibiotics and hormone growth implants in livestock are causing residues in beef and human health hazards.

FACT:

No residues from feeding antibiotics are found in beef, and there is no valid scientific evidence that antibiotic use in cattle causes illnesses resulting from the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Authorities agree hormone implants result in the production of safe beef. Both meat and plant-source foods naturally contain estrogen and other hormones. The estrogen in beef (whether from implanted steers or not) is tiny compared with amounts found in many foods or produced daily by humans.

MYTH:

Use of pesticides is causing environmental and human illness problems. Meat contains more pesticides than do plant-source foods.

FACT:

Government data indicate that, in both plant and animal foods, there are no unsafe chemical residue levels. USDA's official report on residue monitoring of meat showed no violative pesticide residues in beef. Food and Drug Administration tests demonstrate that dietary intakes of any pesticide residues are well below standards set by the Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization.

MYTH:

U.S. cattle produce large amounts of methane, a "greenhouse" gas, thereby contributing to possible global warming.

FACT:

Methane represents only 18 percent of the world's greenhouse gases, and only 7 percent of world methane production can be attributed to cattle. Methane emitted by U.S. beef cattle accounts for only 0.5 percent of world methane production and only 0.1 percent of total greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide, from the burning of gasoline, is a much more significant component of greenhouse gases.

MYTH:

The risk of death from heart disease and other diseases can be greatly reduced if a person avoids eating a meat-centered diet.

FACT:

Lean beef is regarded by health organizations as a valuable part of American diets. The American Dietetic Assn., American Heart Assn. and others generally recommend 5 to 7 oz. of lean, trimmed meat daily. Beef provides large amounts of essential nutrients like iron, vitamin B-12 and protein. The amounts of fat and cholesterol in trimmed beef are low enough that beef is included in low-fat diets.

MYTH:

Livestock raising in the U.S. is largely responsible for loss of topsoil. Overgrazing causes western rangelands to deteriorate.

FACT:

Grains produced and forages harvested for beef cattle account for a small share of soil erosion. Cattle producers, as well as other farmers, are increasingly involved in soil conservation programs. Use of forage and grazing animals to produce food is one way to conserve soil. Experts agree that rangelands, including public lands in the West, are in better condition now than at any time in this century.

MYTH:

It takes 2,500 gallons of water to produce a pound of meat.

FACT:

Use of water in on-farm production of beef averages less than 200 gallons per pound of carcass beef. The total includes drinking water and water used for crop irrigation. Actually, water for cattle production is not "used up." It is quickly recycled (as urine returning to the soil and irrigation water returning to earth as rain after evaporating) as part of nature's hydrological cycle.

