

Did you know ...

# Fat Is Good For You

The war on fat is reconsidered.

by **Larry Corah**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

The war on fat was declared in the 1980s — against marbling and external fat alike — because consumers were being told to simply watch their daily consumption of fat grams. Beef producers responded by focusing on red meat yield.

Today we process beef and serve steaks in a totally different way. Whatever external fat cover that once came with a steak is gone now, and most steaks are sold at retail or on the dinner plate denuded of fat.

That course correction within the beef industry started in the late 1990s, but it would take another decade to reach diet and health advisors and begin affecting consumer demand.

Two recent books started to change how the world views dietary fat. In 2007, science writer Gary Taubes' *Good Calories, Bad Calories* suggested carbohydrates, not dietary fat, cause obesity. In 2014, investigative journalist Nina Teicholz authored *The Big Fat Surprise: Why Butter, Meat and Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet*. She walks us through the history of how and why fat got its bad rap, again concluding foods rich in carbohydrates are the cause of problems.

"Meat is a health food," she emphasizes.

## Researching fatty acids

Yet we still see daily limits on dietary fat,

as though all fat is the same. What is the truth? Well, the answer and what you did not know about fat grams is best addressed by Stephen Smith, Texas A&M University meat biologist, who has spent most of his career studying the subject.

Smith starts by emphasizing that there is good fat and bad fat, so we need to start looking at specific fatty-acid profiles. He points out the kind of fat in marbling is a primary influence of beef flavor. Most importantly, marbling is a "soft" fat with a low melting

point because it contains so much oleic acid. That's a healthy fatty acid, good for us, and especially found in beef from grain-fed cattle.

His research revealing certain beef cuts, like brisket, are especially high in oleic acid, led to stories in the press that brisket is a "health food." Smith even goes so far as to suggest oleic-acid supplements. In studies, they have been shown to decrease low-density lipoprotein (LDL cholesterol).

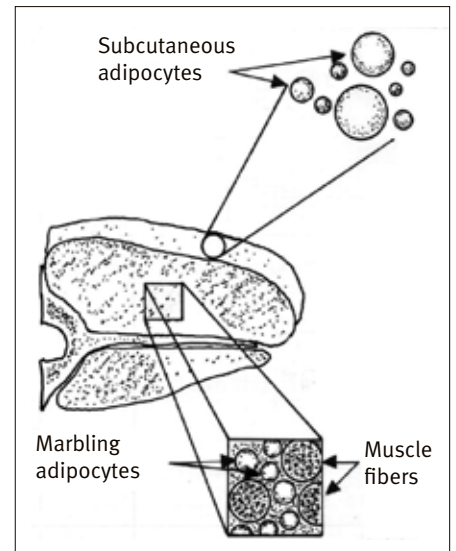
Even though marbling has a good fatty-acid profile, Smith says the external or outside fat around a steak is not as healthy (see Fig. 1). That's not such a concern with today's style of fabrication at beef processing plants.

Moreover, Smith concludes, the kind of



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**Fig. 1: Location of lipids in meat**



**Source:** Presentation entitled "Producing High-Quality Angus Beef" by Stephen B. Smith and David K. Lunt, Texas A&M University.

fat in marbling brings added value to beef carcasses because quality grade is improved. Since this is a fairly heritable trait, producers can easily select for a "healthier" fatty-acid profile.



**Editor's Note:** Now retired, Larry Corah is a consultant for Certified Angus Beef LLC.