

TODAY'S BEEF IS MUCH LEANER AND LOWER IN SATURATED FAT THAN 30 YEARS AGO

The evolution of lean beef: Identifying lean beef in today's U.S. marketplace
McNeill et al. Meat Science, 2012

INTRODUCTION

While lean beef has always been a popular, nutrient-rich source of high-quality protein that can help Americans meet their nutrient needs, today's beef is leaner than ever.

Lean beef is more widely available in the U.S. today because of many changes during the past 40 years in cattle breeding and management practices and retail trimming, many of which were driven by changing dietary recommendations and consumer preferences.



BEEF PRODUCTION PRACTICES

Changes in cattle breeding and fat trimming methods have resulted in increased availability of leaner beef. Today, more than two-thirds (69%) of beef sold at retail, including popular cuts like Sirloin steak, Tenderloin and 95% lean Ground Beef, meet the government guidelines for lean.

Less than 10% of saturated fat and total fat in the diet comes from beef, and the total and saturated fat content from trimmed steak has declined throughout the past 50 years. For example, the total fat content for a completely trimmed Sirloin steak has declined 34% from 1963 to 2015, and the saturated fat content has declined 17% between 1990 and 2010.

CHANGES IN CONSUMER PREFERENCES

The public is aware of longstanding current nutrition recommendations advising them to “go lean with protein” and they recognize this can be accomplished by choosing lean meats and “trimming excess fat off meats”. To ensure a beef supply that meets consumer expectations for leaner cuts, there has been an 80% decrease in external fat on retail beef cuts throughout the past 26 years.

IMPACT ON HEART HEALTH

Research shows lean beef can be good for heart health. Evidence from clinical trials indicates that lean beef is equally as effective as lean white meat at lowering LDL cholesterol when included as part of a well-balanced, low-saturated fat diet.

Contributing to its heart-health benefits, half of the fatty acids in beef are monounsaturated (the same type of heart-healthy fat found in olive oil) and nearly one-third of the saturated fat is stearic acid, a fatty acid that has been shown to have neutral effects on cholesterol.

CONCLUSIONS

Beef is a popular, nutrient-dense food and the availability of at least 29 lean cuts of beef in the U.S. marketplace can help consumers meet their cardiovascular health goals.