

Untold Stories About Canadian Beef

Why Beef Belongs on Your Plate

Janice Tober

As Canadians, we all know that we need to eat well for good health. For most of us, that means switching over to more of our foundational foods in minimally-processed forms. According to a health report published by Statistics Canada in November 2020, consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in Canada, approximately 50 percent of our daily diet is made up of UPFs — high-calorie, high-sugar, high-salt, and nutrient-poor foods.

Alarming? Very, because many of the foods we find on this list are items we might not think of as poor in nutrition.

For instance, a frozen pizza falls under the UPFs definition, as do many baked goods.

But before you throw in the towel and never eat again, there are some foods, like beef, that are so nutritionally packed that they may just help save the day, or at least dinner.

Protein-rich, calorie-light

Most of us can remember learning in biology class that protein is the building block of life. Every cell in our bodies contains it so, yes, it's important. As a foundational food, beef delivers a quality protein — in a compact package — a portion size. Beef gives you a lot of protein in a little amount.

Carol Harrison, a registered dietitian,

says, "Many foods contain protein but the amounts can really vary. For example, to get 35 grams of protein, you would need 100 grams of cooked beef (which is 250 calories), or over 9 tablespoons of peanut butter at 860 calories. Both are nutritious choices, but this really highlights how much more protein we typically get from animal-based foods."

Consider nutrition facts when it comes to beef

But here's the thing: red meats, specifically beef, contain many other key nutrients. "So many people are familiar with beef as one of nature's most protein-rich foods, but what they might not realize is the fantastic nutrient package that comes with beef," says Harrison.

Beef provides heme iron, a vital nutrient needed by our bodies to store and shuttle oxygen.

"Beef is one of nature's best sources of this type of iron — and heme iron is more easily absorbed by our bodies than non-heme iron, (the type found in plant food sources)" adds Harrison. "Infants, teenage girls, women, and athletes are all at risk for low iron and can benefit from the type of iron that beef provides. It's important to point out that low iron is the stage before anemia. With even a low iron level, you can already start to feel very weak, run down and may even have difficulty concentrating."

Some of the other key nutrients beef provides are zinc, important for a healthy immune system, and vitamin B12, for brain health.

The big beef myth: are we eating too much beef?

According to Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Surveys (Nutrition) 2015, Canadians get about five percent of our cal-

ories from fresh red meat — that includes beef, pork, and lamb. Further to this, if we eat 21 meals a week, on average only three of those meals are red meat meals and beef makes up two of those three meals.

"The data makes it clear with five percent of our calories coming from nutrient-rich fresh red meat and almost 50 percent from calorie-rich, nutrient-poor UPFs our priority should be to cut back on UPFs. The nutrition contribution of wholesome foundational foods like beef shouldn't be dismissed. Beef provides a rich source of protein for a modest number of calories along with zinc for healthy growth, vitamin B12 for brain health, and one of nature's best sources of easy-to-absorb iron," says Harrison.

"Replacing whole animal-based foods with whole plant-based foods, for example an egg for walnuts, is like replacing one healthy choice for another. Both are good for you, but for different reasons," says Harrison. "Beef is rich in protein, zinc and vitamin B12 and is one of nature's best sources of easy-to-absorb iron, while foods like beans provide the value of fibre, folate, and potassium. I suggest eating them together to get the benefits of both — like in a beef and bean burrito or nourishing beef and bean combo bowl."

When it comes down to good nutrition, beef is a single-ingredient foundational food. "There's nothing added, and nothing taken away," says Harrison. "There are no fillers, no binders, and no colours — just one ingredient: beef."

i To learn more about why Canadian beef belong on your plate, visit thinkbeef.ca/nutrition. #beefbelongs.

This article was **sponsored by Canada Beef.**



Carol Harrison
Registered Dietitian



DO WE EAT TOO MUCH MEAT?

Canadians get only **5%** of their total calories from **red meat on average** while 50% comes from ultra-processed foods such as chips, pop, and baked goods.



WHAT DOES 35 g OF PROTEIN LOOK LIKE?

Beef (cooked)  **100 grams**
250 CALORIES

Peanut Butter  **Over 9 Tbsp**
860 CALORIES

Almonds  **Over 1 cup**
960 CALORIES



A Fresh Understanding of the Benefits of Raising Cattle in Canada

Did you know that Canadian farmers and ranchers protect native grasslands through raising cattle? Conservationists help to shine light on the immense benefits of raising beef cattle in Canada.

Tania Amardeil



Tom Lynch-Staunton
Regional Vice President of the Alberta Region, Nature Conservancy of Canada



Karli Reimer
Communications & Marketing Lead, Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited Canada

It may come as a surprise to many Canadians that some of the country’s key conservation organizations and advocates are proponents of cattle farming. However, sometimes what you thought was the problem is really the solution. Canada’s beef community plays an important role in nature conservation and ecological health.

Protecting a threatened ecosystem and precious natural resources

There’s a symbiotic relationship between conservation and cattle, and it’s rooted in the landscapes on which Canadian cattle are raised. “The Northern Great Plains are one of the most threatened ecosystems in North America,” says Tom Lynch-Staunton, Regional Vice President of the Alberta Region at the Nature Conservancy of Canada, a non-profit land trust that aims to conserve land with high ecological value. “We’ve lost nearly 75 percent of our grasslands to farming and development, and so we try to preserve the remaining native grasslands. Ranchers also want to preserve that landscape.”

In Canada, what little remains intact of our endangered grasslands is largely under the care of families that raise beef cattle.

“In Canada, the beef industry benefits our environment because it’s protecting important natural landscapes,” says Karli Reimer, Communications and Marketing Lead, Agriculture at Ducks Unlimited Canada, a wetland conservation organization. “Without a beef industry, we’re at great risk of losing those areas.”

How grazing cattle are critical to a healthy ecosystem

The grasslands are rich ecosystems with many environmental benefits. “The wetlands and grasslands that are important to the beef community also provide many environmental benefits to society,” says Reimer. “They store carbon, conserve our soil, provide clean water,

protect us from flooding and drought, and are full of biodiversity, including pollinators and at-risk species.”

Not only does raising cattle prevent grasslands from being converted to cropland or developed, but grazing is also critical to a healthy ecosystem. “These grasslands evolved on grazing and fire as disturbances,” says Lynch-Staunton. “It used to be large bison herds, and now it’s primarily cattle. When you manage the grasslands with cattle, you can still have a compatible use with wildlife and biodiversity and other ecosystem functions, which is so important.”

Nature-positive food production that Canadians can be proud of

By building and fertilizing soil, sequestering immense amounts of carbon, preserving our endangered native grasslands, and providing the majority of wildlife habitat on food-producing lands, cattle contribute to nature-positive food production.

“Nature-positive food production is raising or growing food in a way that works with the environment and not against it,” says Reimer. “It’s a commitment to environmental, social, and economic sustainability for our food systems.”

“Ranchers are environmentalists and we sometimes forget that they truly believe in sustainability, in stewardship of the land, taking care of it the best they can, and ensuring that it’s going to last for the next generation,” says Lynch-Staunton.



To learn more about the vital role of cattle in preserving our endangered native grasslands, visit guardiansofthegrasslands.ca.

This article was sponsored by the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association.



The Benefits of Beef Cattle



35 million acres of native temperate grasslands are cared for by beef farmers and ranchers



Grazing is critical to a healthy grassland ecosystem and supports plant and animal biodiversity



Cattle preserve and share the grasslands with over **60** species at-risk

The Value of Nature-Positive Food Production



Builds and improves soil while reducing erosion



Grasslands and pastures under the care of beef farmers and ranchers store approximately **1.5 billion** tonnes of carbon



Raising beef cattle uses just **33%** of agricultural land in Canada but provides **68%** of wildlife habitat capacity

How This Ontario Beef Farmer Is Improving Biodiversity

Sandra Vos, a nurse and sole female operator of an Ontario beef farm, explains how nature and nutrition can work together.

Anne Papmehl

How did you get into beef farming?

An opportunity came up to buy an 80-acre farm in Brant County almost 20 years ago. I said yes without having any farming background, except for helping at my uncle’s farm. I knew nothing about planting, making hay, or how to drive a tractor, and was afraid of cows. The land needed some restoring, so thinking through what I could do to make it safe and efficient for me as a sole female operator, I decided to make it a grass farm, and that led me to raising cattle.

Tell us how cattle raising can be good for the environment

As a nurse, I’ve always believed that good health comes from good food, and good food comes from good soil. The cattle on my farm do amazing things for the soil and help create many different types of forages that attract birds, bees, and butterflies. Without the grazing cattle, those habitats wouldn’t exist.

What type of sustainable practices do you use on your farm and how does animal impact play a role?

I practise something called rotational grazing. By moving my cows every day, I’m not only giving the grass a chance to grow back, but I’m also spreading around the manure and urine, which are organic fertilizers. The bugs in the ground pull the manure down into the soil, creating organic matter, which is critical to healthy soil biology, as well as to holding the rain and sequestering carbon. I think that sort of animal impact is essential to restoring some of the grasslands we’ve lost.

As a farmer and a nurse, how do you see nature and nutrition working together?

Biodiversity is good for the land but it’s also

good for nutrition. I think working with nature — rather than against nature — translates into an amazing end product. If the land is healthy and producing lots of good, biodiverse forage for your cattle to eat, then it’s producing good nutrition in the meat. The cows also work to keep the land healthy. Aside from improving the soil biology, they help keep invasive plant species at bay. Cows are great at eating things like grape leaves, for example, and preventing them from strangling the trees in the bush pastures.

What are the common misconceptions around beef production and consumption in Canada?

One thing I hear is that we’re eating too much red meat, but every chart shows that red meat consumption has been declining for 30 years. In terms of the environment, Canada is uniquely suited to raising cattle with our cold climate and large tracts of natural grasslands and pastures. Another misconception is that all beef comes from factory farms. In fact, about 98 percent of our beef farms are small, family-run farms, and the bulk of a cow’s or calf’s life is spent eating hay and grass in the pasture.

How can beef be a healthy, sustainable, and local option?

Beef is nutritionally dense and rich in minerals like zinc, magnesium, and iron. By supporting local beef farmers who use sustainable practices, you’re also helping to make a difference in the environment.



To learn more about beef farming in Ontario, visit ontbeef.ca.

This article was sponsored by Beef Farmers of Ontario.

