HEALTHY RESULTS

Sustainable Beef

By Anne Milling, RD, LDN
anne@healthyresultsteam.com

Summary: Eat smaller portions of meat, especially beef, and eat it less often to reduce your impact on global warming. When available, chose 100% grass-fed organic beef and other meats.

I love beef. Beef tenderloin with horseradish sauce, grilled skirt steak and cheeseburgers are a few of my favorite meals. Plus, beef is one of the best sources of iron, B12 and makes me feel fuller than carbs. The problem is that most people eat more beef than is healthy for them or the environment. Beef's high calories, artery clogging saturated fat, high price tag, and considerable impact on global warming have caused me to cut back on how much I consume. Livestock, but mainly cows, contribute nearly one fifth of man-made greenhouse gases, a statistic estimated by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. That's more than greenhouse gases produced from all forms of transportation.

Cows are the number one source of the potent greenhouse gas methane, a natural by-product of their ruminant digestion. Methane is especially bad for the environment because it traps warm air 25 times more efficiently than carbon dioxide. Conventionally grown cows also heavily consume resources, as 7 lbs of corn and 2500 gallons of water is needed to produce just 1 lb of beef. Beef and dairy account for 50 percent of the typical American's dietary carbon footprint, or "foodprint."

Choosing sustainably grown beef is one way to reduce your foodprint and still enjoy beef in your diet. Sustainable cattle are 100% grass-fed – the cows roam free and graze on grass, their manure fertilizing the ground. Feed isn't trucked in, manure isn't trucked out, and corn is left for humans to eat. The cows live a richer, more humane life and the resulting beef is healthier than that of conventionally grown cows. Grass fed beef has 2-4 times the healthy omega 3 fat, vitamin E, vitamin C, beta carotene and fewer calories per serving than grain fed cattle.

However, cows still generate methane no matter what they're fed, so eating less beef is best way to decrease your foodprint. Anthony McMichael, a leading Australia-based expert on climate change and health issues, estimates reducing beef consumption to two small servings a week and reducing all meat consumption to only 3 oz a day to protect the climate. Geophysists at the Bard Center and University of Chicago estimate that reducing all meat consumption by 20% is like switching from driving a regular sedan to an energy efficient Prius. There are numerous things you can do to help reduce your foodprint – fewer car trips to the grocery store, buying organic and locally grown food, bringing your own bags and recycling – but reducing the meat, especially beef, on your plate will make the biggest difference.

Healthy Results Recommendation:

Choose 100% grass-fed beef and limit your portion to 3-4 ounces (about the size of the palm of your hand or a deck of cards). Add "Meatless Mondays" to your weekly dinner plan and limit beef to two meals a week. The quality of grass-fed beef is improving, but it tends to be tougher since it has less fat marbling. Use a tenderizing marinade (try the pineapple/tamari marinade in the recipe). For the tastiest results, only cook grass-fed beef to rare or medium rare. Go to the Low Carbon Diet interactive tool to learn how you can further reduce your foodprint at www.eattlowcarbon.org/Carbon-Calculator.html.

Sources:

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Grilled Skirt Steak in Lettuce Leaves With Tamari-Ginger Dipping Sauce

12 servings
30 minutes to prepare, 2-3 hours to marinate

3 lbs skirt steak
Bamboo skewers

For Marinade
1 cup tamari or soy sauce
4 limes, juice of
1 (6 ounce) can pineapple juice
1 small sliced onion
salt and pepper, to taste

For Dipping Sauce
2 tbsp chopped fresh peeled gingerroot
1 teaspoon chopped garlic
2 tablespoons brown sugar
½ cup white vinegar
1 bunch scallion

3 heads butter lettuce
4 sprigs Thai basil, plus additional Thai basil, for garnish
4 sprigs fresh cilantro, plus additional fresh cilantro, for garnish

1. For the **marinade**, combine in a large bowl ¾ cup of the tamari sauce, the juice of 2 limes, the pineapple juice, and the sliced onion. Mix well, season with salt and pepper, and pour over the beef. Allow this to marinate in a zip-lock bag in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours. Soak the skewers in water for 20 minutes so they don't burn on the grill. Remove the beef from the marinade, and skewer with the bamboo.

2. For the **dipping sauce**, in a small bowl combine the remaining ¼ cup tamari sauce, the ginger, garlic, sugar, juice of the remaining 2 limes, the vinegar, and scallions. Check the seasoning, and transfer to a small serving bowl.

3. Cook on a hot grill for about 2-3 minute on each side, and allow to cool. On a large platter, lay out the butter lettuce leaves, then on each leaf, place a few basil and cilantro leaves and then the beef skewer on top. Serve with the dipping sauce.

Source: Adapted from Govind Armstrong, Wall Street Journal