

U.S. BEEF

A GLOBAL LEADER IN SUSTAINABILITY & ANIMAL WELFARE

In Brief:

- American beef producers have known for generations how important it is to keep their animals healthy and contented. Their commitment to providing quality care proves itself in the data: U.S. herds represent only 8% of the world's cattle yet provide 18% of the world's beef. In contrast, India and Brazil boast beef operations twice that of the U.S., yet produce just 15% and 6.9%, respectively. Beef cattle production, from feed production to animals leaving the feedyard, represents 3.3% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Typically, American beef cattle spend two-thirds of their lives grazing on land that is unsuitable for crops, converting rangeland into safe and accessible protein for millions of people. The beef industry doesn't stop at meat, however; it prudently utilizes and recycles 99% of every carcass to make life-saving pharmaceuticals, gasoline alternatives, and hundreds of other household and industrial uses.

Environmental Stewardship: A commitment to continuous improvement

- By embracing scientific research and best practices, American beef ranchers have avoided 2.3 gigatons of carbon emissions since 1975.
- Beef is as efficient as pork and poultry when it comes to meat production, requiring just 2.6 kgs per kg (2.6 lbs. of grain per lb.) of beef carcass weight.
- Modern beef production requires fewer resources than the equivalent system in 1977, using 69.9% of animals, 81.4% of feedstuffs, 87.9% of the water, and only 67.0% of the land required to produce 1 billion kgs of beef. This has reduced the waste outputs and beef's carbon footprint by 16.3% from 1977 levels.
- Since 2013, the dairy sector has contributed about 20% of beef annually (approximately 2 billion kgs or 5 billion pounds) through cull cows and finished dairy steers and heifers to the U.S. beef supply chain.
- If the rest of the world adopted U.S. care and production practices, the global cattle herd would shrink by 62%, or 975 million head.



Cattle do more than recycle – they upcycle inedible plants into high-quality protein

- Beef cattle generate 19% more protein than they eat because their unique digestive system allows them to convert human-inedible plants into high-quality protein. This ability is key to providing useful calories, protein, and an abundance of vitamins for an ever-escalating world population.
- 90% of what cattle eat is forage and plant leftovers that are inedible for humans.



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- More than 40% of the land in the continuous U.S. is pasture and rangeland that is too rocky, steep, and/or arid to support cultivated agriculture – yet cattle thrive there, coexisting with natural ecosystems while potentially mitigating wildfire risks.

Social Responsibility: - A commitment to future generations

- Almost all 913,000 beef operations are family-owned or individually operated - 91% and 82% are small enterprises with 50 head or less.
- In 2012, women were the primary managers of 66,714 beef operations.
- The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program represents more than 80% of U.S. beef producers, and some of the largest beef purchasers make BQA participation a requirement. Members are trained in sustainability and welfare standards that exceed their predecessors, and are kept up-to-date with the latest innovations, training, and protocols to ensure their animals and farms are cared for properly.



- The meat and poultry industry is one of the most regulated industries in America. Each processing site is required to have USDA inspectors on site continuously – this protects both animals and consumers, as inspectors are able to stop production immediately if concerns arise.
- Because 78% of cattlemen and women intend to pass their farm on to their children, they strive to leave the land, water and other natural resources in better shape than when they acquired them. Between 2005 and 2011, emissions into watersheds decreased by 10%, emissions into land decreased by 7%, and occupational illnesses and accidents were reduced by 32%.

Economic Profitability: A commitment to long-term viability

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, the economic impact of the beef industry is €77 billion (\$88.25 billion) in farm gate receipts for cattle and calves.
- The beef industry directly and indirectly accounts for more than 1.4 million full-time jobs and more than €164 billion (\$188 billion) in output to the national economy. The beef industry supports veterinarians, shop keepers, other farmers, salespeople, researchers, and more. The average pay in processing facilities is €13/hour (\$14.98/hr.) nearly twice the minimum wage, plus benefits. Many of these jobs are filled by individuals who have recently moved to the U.S.

Unintended consequences of eliminating beef

- According to research published in the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences, if all livestock in the U.S. were eliminated and every American followed a vegan diet, greenhouse gas emissions would only be reduced by 2.6%, or 0.36% globally. This would lead to an increase in use of synthetic fertilizer and increased soil erosion, and Americans would need to figure out a way to get vitamin B12 (it's found almost exclusively in animal products), which is responsible for forming red blood cells properly, synthesizing DNA, and neurological function.

Resources

Capper, JL. *The environmental impact of beef production in the United States: 1977 compared with 2007*. Journal of Animal Science (2011) Dec;89(12):4249-61

Rotz, Asem-Hiablie, Place, and Thoma. *Environmental Footprints of Beef Cattle Production in*



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the United States. Agricultural Systems (2019) p. 1-13

National Cattlemen's Beef Board, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, and FSIS

Infographic: <https://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/marketing-resources/infographic-library>



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