

# Beef 101

## Our guide to getting the most from your beef \$\$\$

### **Prime:**

Usually reserved for high-end hotels and restaurants. Is from very select, young, well-fed cattle. Has characteristically abundant marbling.

### **Choice:**

High quality beef and produced in highest quantity, but has less marbling than Prime.

### **Select:**

Slightly leaner than Prime and Choice because it has less marbling. It can lack some tenderness, flavor and juiciness as compared to the higher grades. Select grade beef often benefits from slow-cooking or from marinating prior to grilling or broiling.

### **Ground chuck, round or sirloin, oh my**

Ground beef is generally (as the name suggests) ground up chunks of leftover cuts of beef. But there is rhyme and reason to what gets ground. Ground chuck is ground from the shoulder portion. Round is from the other end, the upper leg and rump of the cow, while sirloin is from the leaner, hip section of the animal. Ground beef or hamburger is a hodgepodge of cuts, but must be beef muscle and must be at least 70 percent lean.

### **Percentages of fat**

In order to be called ground beef, the meat must be at least 70 percent lean with no more than 30 percent fat, according to Mom at the Meat Counter blogger, Dr. Janeal Yancey, who also holds a PhD in meat science (who knew there was such a thing). She writes also, that ground beef must be of ground muscle, no eyes, lips or skin, and of course it has to be from cattle.

Most hamburger meat sold is 73, 80 or 90-95 percent lean, listed as 73/27, 80/20 or 90/10 for the ratio of lean to fat content. Basically, fat is flavor, yet in hamburgers too much fat content will result in a lot of fat rendering (melting and running off into the fire causing flare ups and shrinkage in the patty).

Lean ground beef – 95/5

Ground sirloin – 90/10

Ground round – 85/15

Ground chuck – 80/20

Hamburger/ground beef – 73/27

According to *Cooks* magazine, the best burgers come from ground chuck in the 15-20 percent fat range.

### **Grass fed or grain finished?**

As opposed to what the grass fed label implies of its (perhaps less pretentious counterpart), most cows live their lives in a pasture. They graze, eat forage, hay or silage. According “Beef it’s What’s for Dinner” website, when beef is grain-finished, “cattle are free to eat a balanced diet of grain, local feed ingredients, like potato hulls or sugar beets and hay or forage at the feedyard.”

According to Janeal Yancey’s blog, grain finished beef cows are fed a “high-concentrate (grain) diet allows them to gain weight more efficiently and gives the beef the flavor and tenderness we expect in the US.”

Cows must get fiber (roughages), too. So, they are given hay, silage (fermented hay) and other forms of roughage.

### **Certified Organic beef**

Beef from cattle that has ever receive any antibiotics or growth-promoting hormones. The cattle may be either grain- or grass-finished, as long as the USDA’s Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) certifies the feed is 100 percent organically grown.