

# Should we eat red meat? The nutrition and the ethics

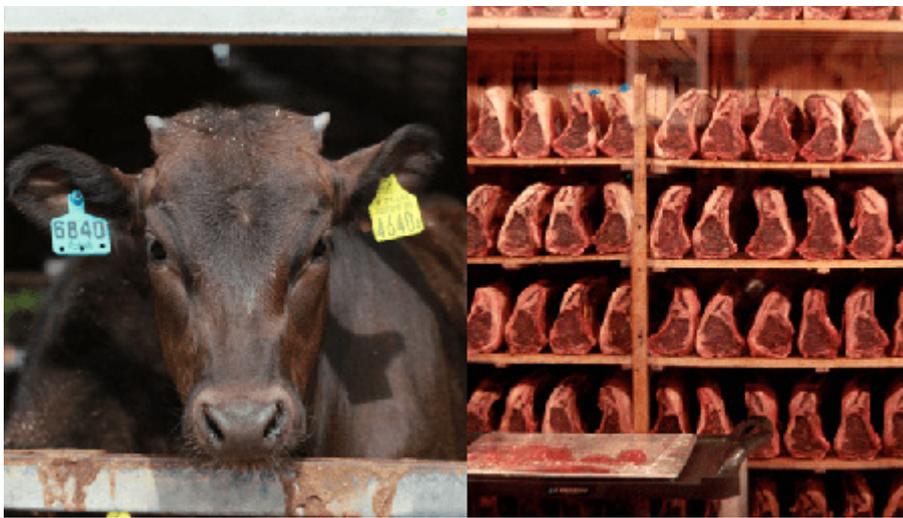
Article Publisher: **THE CONVERSATION**

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## PRE-READING

### Word Check

- polyunsaturated fat



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### Discuss

- What are some different red meats available?
- Which kinds of red meat are better for our health? What is a 'lean meat' product?
- How can red meat production and consumption have a negative impact on the following?
  - The environment
  - Human health
  - Animal welfare
- What can we do to improve any negative aspects associated with red meat production and consumption?
- Should we eat red meat?

*Before you read, try to answer the following questions:*

1. Lean meat products have lower amounts of .....
2. The Australian Dietary Guidelines advise that a balanced diet **should / shouldn't** include meat products.
3. Hot dogs can be bad for you. **T / F**
4. Which is healthier - beef and sheep meats or horse and kangaroo meats? .....
5. There is no nutritional difference between grass-fed beef and grain-fed beef. **T / F**
6. What would be better in terms of nutrient levels and animal and environmental ethics - beef from Australia or the United States? .....
7. The type of grain an animal eats has no effect on the end product. **T / F**
8. There is clear scientific evidence that eating red meat is bad for you. **T / F**
9. What do you think the following figure refers to?
  - **4% of the Australian population –**

*Read the article and check your answers*

## **Should we eat red meat?**

Many types of red meat and red meat products are available, from farmers' markets, to supermarkets, to restaurants. The impacts of their production and consumption on human health, animal welfare and the environment are complex.

So what should we be thinking about when we're deciding whether or not to eat red meat?

### **The nutrition**

Consuming lean products and different cuts, or muscles, of meat from cattle, sheep, pig, goat and kangaroo is recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines as part of a balanced diet. Lean refers to animal muscle tissue that has lower amounts of total fat and saturated fat compared to higher-fat alternatives.

Most lean red meats are cuts, rather than processed products such as hot dogs or canned meat. Cuts provide many beneficial nutrients, including: protein, vitamin B12, zinc, iron and unsaturated fat (such as omega-3 polyunsaturated fats).

In comparison, fattier red meat cuts and most processed meat products provide higher amounts of potentially harmful nutrients, such as saturated fats, salt and sodium nitrate.

In general, horse and kangaroo meats have been reported to have the lowest total fat and highest polyunsaturated fat contents. Beef and sheep meats have the highest total fat and lowest polyunsaturated fat. Grass-fed beef is a better source of omega-3 polyunsaturated fats compared to grain-fed beef, although fish provides significantly more omega-3 than any red meat.

Australian livestock is mostly grass-fed in fields, rather than grain-fed in feedlots. This is better for both nutrient levels in the meat and animal and environmental ethics. Feedlots are more common in the United States, for example.

The type of grain that is fed to an animal affects its muscle nutrient composition, as well as shelf-life, taste, colour and quality. For example, pigs can be fed on a certain amount and type of linseed to increase omega-3 polyunsaturated fat in their meat.

### **Associations with ill health**

The links between red meat products and human health are not fully understood, but you may have seen recent media reports about processed meat and cancer risk.

It is likely that eating less processed meat will reduce your risk of getting cancer. It's also probable eating less red meat will reduce your cancer risk.

Similarly, if unsaturated fats – especially polyunsaturated fats – replace saturated fats (for example, in red meat) in someone’s diet, the risk of coronary heart disease might be reduced. Further, processed meats have been linked to a higher incidence of coronary heart disease and diabetes.

### **The ethics**

The ethics of consuming food, including animal produce, is a fraught topic for both animal welfare and environmental damage. The vast scale of commercialised livestock production is overwhelming. Yes, any food that humans consume comes with consequences, especially when that food is mass-produced. However, with red meat, efficiency and cost can outweigh animal welfare when animals become “a commodity, a unit in the production line”. And there is huge environmental damage from livestock production, such as methane from manure and enteric fermentation (that is, farts!).

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations stated in 2006:

The livestock sector emerges as one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global.

It must be hoped the animal welfare and environmental aspects of food consumption will be highlighted in future revisions of the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

### **What can you do?**

You probably care about your health, and hopefully you care about other animals and the environment. Luckily, you can do a few things to try to improve all of these aspects of red meat and red meat product consumption:

- When (or if) you eat red meat: choose leaner options that have less total and saturated fat, such as lean beef mince in place of standard beef mince; choose meats that contain more polyunsaturated fats, such as kangaroo or grass-fed beef (I don’t envisage many Australians eating horse, which is also higher in these fats); avoid processed meat such as bacon, sausages and salami; and buy from retailers and eat at restaurants where the red meat is sourced from more ethical, smaller-scale, local and sustainable farms
- Eat less red meat (Meat Free Mondays is one good idea)
- Join the 4% of the Australian population following vegetarian or vegan eating habits.

## POST READING

- If you want to get a lot of omega-3 polyunsaturated fats into your diet, a good food to eat would be .....
- What is likely to lower your risk of getting cancer?
  - A. Eating only processed meat
  - B. Eating a little lean red meat but no processed meat
  - C. Eating no red meat
- Eating processed meats are associated with which other health problems? .....
- With red meat production, what can take priority over animal welfare concerns? .....
- The Australian Dietary Guidelines provide details about how the food we eat can impact on animal welfare and the environment. **T / F**
- The author recommends:
  - I. Eating as much meat as you want as long as it is healthier, like kangaroo.
  - II. Eating some red meat because it is essential for a balanced diet, but try to eat less.
  - III. Eating no meat.

## WRITING

Some people say we shouldn't eat any red meat because it can harm our health and the way it is produced can result in environmental damage and animal welfare issues. Others say red meat is an important part of our diet.

**Discuss both views and give your opinion.**

VOCABULARY

Which words listed below could replace the underlined words in the text?

<b>considerably</b>	<b>environmentally friendly</b>	<b>feature</b>	<b>imagine</b>
<b>immense</b>	<b>obtain</b>	<b>occurrence</b>	<b>options</b>
<b>product</b>	<b>dung</b>	<b>regular</b>	<b>size</b>
			<b>structure</b>

<b>alternatives</b>	
<b>significantly</b>	
<b>composition</b>	
<b>incidence</b>	
<b>vast</b>	
<b>commodity</b>	
<b>manure</b>	

<b>aspect</b>	
<b>standard</b>	
<b>envisage</b>	
<b>source</b>	
<b>scale</b>	
<b>sustainable</b>	

Use the same words in the tables above to complete the sentences

- Cattle farms can be environmentally harmful because of the ..... quantities of land and water required to raise beef.
- Horse ..... is commonly uses as a fertilizer for agricultural crops.
- Large ..... dairy farms are more common today because it is very hard for smaller farms to survive in a very competitive market.
- Many developing countries rely heavily on the export of primary ..... such as coffee beans and other agricultural products for foreign exchange.
- Many people say they couldn't go vegetarian because meat is such a big part of their everyday diet. But as vegetarians will say, there are plenty of wholesome and delicious .....
- More and more people these days prefer to pay more to purchase food from ..... producers, such as smaller, family owned farms.
- One of the most interesting ..... of the music journalist's job was meeting famous musicians from around the world.
- Some studies show that a diet ..... of mostly organic food is not necessarily any healthier than one without organic products.
- The butcher ..... all their meat from organic farms.
- The woman had been a vegetarian for only 3 months but she couldn't ..... eating meat ever again.
- There is now a ..... amount of research linking excessive consumption of processed meat to cancer.
- Under national health guidelines, it is recommended an adult eats at least 5 serves of vegetables a day with a ..... serving size being around 75 grams.
- When animal products are mass-produced, there tends to be a higher ..... of animal cruelty.

## Answer Key

1. fat (total and saturated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fish</li> <li>• Eating no red meat</li> <li>• coronary heart disease and diabetes</li> <li>• efficiency and cost</li> <li>• F</li> <li>• Eating no meat</li> </ul>
2. should – lean meat	
3. T	
4. horse and kangaroo	
5. F	
6. Australia	
7. F	
8. F	
9. Are following vegetarian or vegan eating habits	

alternatives	options
significantly	considerably
composition	structure
incidence	occurrence
vast	immense
commodity	product
manure	dung

aspect	feature
standard	regular
envisage	imagine
source	obtain
scale	size
sustainable	environmentally friendly

1. Cattle farms can be environmentally harmful because of the **vast** quantities of land and water required to raise beef.
2. Horse **manure** is commonly uses as a fertilizer for agricultural crops.
3. Large **scale** dairy farms are more common today because it is very hard for smaller farms to survive in a very competitive market.
4. Many developing countries rely heavily on the export of primary **commodities** such as coffee beans and other agricultural products for foreign exchange.
5. Many people say they couldn't go vegetarian because meat is such a big part of their everyday diet. But as vegetarians will say, there are plenty of wholesome and delicious **alternatives**.
6. More and more people these days prefer to pay more to purchase food from **sustainable** producers, such as smaller, family owned farms.
7. One of the most interesting **aspects** of the music journalist's job was meeting famous musicians from around the world.
8. Some studies show that a diet **composed** of mostly organic food is not necessarily any healthier than one without organic products.
9. The butcher **sources** all their meat from organic farms.
10. The woman had been a vegetarian for only 3 months but she couldn't **envisage** eating meat ever again.
11. There is now a **significant** amount of research linking excessive consumption of processed meat to cancer.
12. Under national health guidelines, it is recommended an adult eats at least 5 serves of vegetables a day with a **standard** serving size being around 75 grams.
13. When animal products are mass-produced, there tends to be a higher **incidence** of animal cruelty.