

National Beef Month: Facts About Cows

What is Wagyu beef? What is Angus beef? What are the grades of beef? How many cows are in the world? Learn these facts about cows during National Beef Month!

May is National Beef Month...and why not? The weather is perfect for grilling—especially with Memorial Day at the end of the month—and nothing is better on the grill than a sizzling cut of beef. So to whet your appetite, we'll give you some Beef Month facts to chew on: a little history, a breakdown of beef cattle breeds like Angus and Wagyu, and more mouth-watering knowledge that will make you smart and hungry at the same time.

The History of Beef... It's Not All Bull

Modern cattle are descended from a now-extinct wild bovine called the aurochs (pronounced OR-ox). Humans domesticated the aurochs about 10,000 years ago and raised it for both meat and dairy.

Christopher Columbus brought Spanish cattle to Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) on his second voyage in 1493. The Spanish explorer Cortez transported some of the stock to Mexico in 1519, and Ponce de Leon brought Spanish cattle to Florida two years later. These were the first cattle brought to what is now the United States.

Descendants of Cortez's cattle entered what is now Texas in 1690, and would eventually become the breed known as Texas Longhorns. Other Mexican cattle were driven north to Spanish missions in California in 1773.

Meanwhile, English settlers brought their own cattle to the Jamestown colony in 1611, and the English Devon breed was imported to the Plymouth colony in 1623. These cattle were all-purpose farm animals; the cows were used for milk, the bulls for drafting and plowing, and all provided quality beef. The Hereford breed, developed in Hereford, England, came to Kentucky in 1817 and became the dominant beef breed through the 1960s.

The real explosion of beef as a primary American food staple came with the post-Civil War westward expansion. Beef cattle require a lot of land and thrive on low-quality feed like grass, and as much of this new territory was covered in native grasses and less suitable for growing food crops, it was the perfect place for the beef industry to begin. After these western cattle had been raised on grass, the cowboys moved them in great cattle drives to feedlots to be fattened up on grain. Then they were loaded on trains and shipped to the Midwest for slaughtering. As Chicago was

the primary railroad hub, it was also home to numerous slaughterhouses. (The name of Chicago's NBA team, the Bulls, is a nod to the city's meat processing past.) After processing, the beef was shipped back East on refrigerator cars.

What Is Angus Beef?

Angus cattle are native to the counties of Aberdeenshire and Angus in Scotland, and in most parts of the world are known as Aberdeen Angus. First imported to Kansas in 1873, this breed has overtaken Hereford as the most popular beef breed in the United States. According to the American Angus Association, Angus and Angus hybrids comprise 60 percent of American beef cattle. Angus cattle are naturally polled (hornless), and were originally black in color. A red strain of Angus emerged in the 1800s, and while the UK registers both colors as Angus, they are considered two separate breeds in the United States.

Angus cattle are muscular and considered medium-sized; Continental breeds such as Charolais and Limousin are larger and leaner. And while Angus is the most common beef breed in America, not all Angus cattle are Certified Angus. To qualify for that distinction, animals must meet a series of ten requirements, including weight, maturity, rib eye size, and marbling (intramuscular fat content). In fact, Angus beef is particularly popular in Japan for its marbling... but it's certainly not the most famous—or even well marbled—beef in Japan.

What is Wagyu Beef?

Wagyu (pronounced wa-GYOO) is a breed of Japanese beef cattle. While the name could be applied to any beef cattle in Japan ("Wa" means Japanese and "Gyu" means cow), there are only four breeds considered Wagyu: Japanese Black, Japanese Brown (known as Red Wagyu in the U.S.), Japanese Polled and Japanese Shorthorn.

Most Americans are more familiar with the term "Kobe beef" than

they are with Wagyu, and use the terms interchangeably. However, they are not the same. The very finest and most exclusive Wagyu beef comes from Kobe, which is a city in Japan and is also considered a region...as Emmental is in Switzerland or Champagne in France. While all Kobe is Wagyu, not all Wagyu is Kobe. Genuine Kobe beef will cost around \$200 per steak or \$50 for a burger, and is rarely seen on American menus. However, there are domestic producers offering excellent "Kobe-style beef".

Wagyu producers claim the fat in this beef has a healthier fatty acid profile, including higher levels of monounsaturated fat and CLA (conjugated linoleic acid). Whether or not this is true, one thing for sure is that Wagyu beef is highly marbled—the primary factor in grading beef.

What Are the Grades of Beef?

We've all heard the terms prime, choice and select...but what do they mean? According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):

Prime beef is produced from young, well-fed beef cattle. It has abundant marbling (the amount of fat interspersed with lean meat), and is generally sold in restaurants and hotels. Prime roasts and steaks are excellent for dry-heat cooking such as broiling, roasting or grilling.

Choice beef is high quality, but has less marbling than Prime. Choice roasts and steaks from the loin and rib will be very tender, juicy, and flavorful and are suited for dry-heat cooking.

Many of the less tender cuts can also be cooked with dry heat if not overcooked. Such cuts will be most tender if braised, roasted or simmered with a small amount of liquid in a tightly covered pan.

Select beef is very uniform in quality and normally leaner than the higher grades. It is fairly tender, but, because it has less marbling, it may lack some of the juiciness and flavor of the higher grades. Only the tender cuts should be cooked with dry heat. Other cuts should be marinated before cooking or braised to obtain maximum tenderness and flavor.

There are other grades of beef. Again according to USDA, "Standard and

Commercial grades of beef are frequently sold as ungraded or as store brand meat. Utility, Cutter, and Canner grades of beef are seldom, if ever, sold at retail but are used instead to make ground beef and processed products."

Facts About Cows

First off, they aren't all cows. Cattle are called by these names:

Cow: Adult female that has produced a calf

Bull: Adult male

Steer: Adult male bovine that has been castrated and cannot breed

Heifer: Young female that has not produced a calf

Calf: Immature male or female.

Steers fatten quickly and produce the best beef. Calves that are raised to 475–500 pounds are sold as veal.

Other facts:

The combined value

of the cattle and beef industry is \$200 billion.

Cattle produce about 25 billion pounds of meat each year.

One serving of beef is 3 ounces and provides more than half of your required protein for the day. It is also a source of all necessary amino acids.

The basic cuts of beef are the chuck, loin, rib and round. Names for the cuts of meat can vary from region to region.

How Many Cows Are in the World?

Estimates are between 970 million and 1.4 billion cattle on the planet. India has the largest cattle inventory in the world, followed by Brazil and China. Those three countries are home to roughly 64% of the world's cattle.

The U.S. has the fourth largest cattle see FACTS page 7

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