

How is your beef finished?

The “finishing period” for beef cattle refers to the time at the end of their lives when they are prepared for slaughter. Many producers try to fatten their animals as efficiently as possible during the finishing period.

Conventional

Before the finishing period, most conventional beef is grazed. This grazing can be harmful to the environment; feed is often sprayed with toxic chemicals and grown with synthetic fertilizers that are not climate or ecosystem friendly.

Feedlot Finished

The majority of beef in the US is finished on crowded, dirty feedlots. Cattle eat concentrated feed that is heavily sprayed and often GMO, as well as waste products from other food industries. The majority of cattle finished in feedlots receive low doses of antibiotics and hormones.

100% Grass Fed

Non-organic, 100% grass-fed beef is finished on a pasture or forage diet, but federal requirements are lax and not well-enforced. In practice, “100% grass fed” generally means cattle are not fed grain; they may eat sugar beets, molasses, and other products they are not well-adapted to eating. Antibiotics and hormones are permitted and pasture and feed may be genetically engineered and grown using toxic pesticides. Regulation for pollution is mixed and public lands may be degraded.

Feedlot Finished

Organic beef can be finished on a feedlot similar to conventional systems, but without antibiotics, hormones, and conventional feed. During this time, beef must have access to pasture only when the finishing period overlaps with the grazing season. In that case, there’s no minimum amount of forage or pasture they must eat; they may not see green at all.

Supplemental

Producers don’t use traditional feedlots but supplement cattle diet with organic grain and other concentrates while they remain on a diet that is mostly forage-based. They have access to pasture during the grazing season and the cattle derive some nutrition from it.

Organic

All organic beef starts with strict pasture and grazing requirements before the finishing period starts. All feed at all points of the animal’s life must also be certified organic. Antibiotics, toxic pesticides, and growth hormones are not allowed.

100% Organic and Grass Fed

Organic and 100% grass-fed beef are finished the same way they are raised: on pasture and with organic forage-based feed (typically hay and silage). Some producers still feed non-grain concentrates like molasses as a supplement to the forage. Organic and 100% grass-fed cattle may take longer to reach slaughter weight, making their meat pricier.

