



1. Was the cow raised on pasture? or How was the animal raised?

When animals are raised on pasture or in fields, they graze outdoors. Cows' stomachs are designed to digest grasses – they are called ruminants and eat grass. You want the farmer to tell you that the cow grazed out on the fields and ate a vegetarian diet. Obviously, the animal has to be milked, so some time will probably be spent indoors, but you want to make sure the animal has had adequate time to graze outdoors.

2. Was the animal fed anything else besides grass?

You want to know if the farmer fed the animal any supplements, byproducts or additional types of feed. On factory farms, the animals might be fed such things as cement dust, rotten and outdated food, poultry litter, and other unsavory products.

Animals are also fed animal byproducts, even since the 2003 Mad Cow Disease discovery in the US. There are efforts to stop the loopholes where cows can be fed back to cows (as of June 2004, the loopholes still existed). But even if all the loopholes are closed, other animals can still be ground up and fed to cows (who, remember, are vegetarians by nature). Supplements often contain animal fat and protein.

The only way to be sure there are no animal products in the feed being given to the animal is to know that the animal had a 100% vegetarian diet or was given 100% vegetarian feed, though a high amount of corn in the animal's diet can make it sick.

3. Was the cow given rBGH or any type of synthetic hormone?

An estimated 30% of all dairy cows are injected with a genetically engineered hormone called recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH). This

hormone forces cows to produce more milk, and often leads to painful udder infections that cause pus and blood to mix in with the milk. Because the animals become more prone to sickness, they are given increased levels of antibiotics and other drugs, and residues of these medications can be found in the milk. Most countries do not allow the use of rBGH because of concerns over the safety of the product. You should not buy milk, cheese, ice cream, yogurt or any dairy product that was made from cows given rBGH.

4. Was the animal ever given antibiotics?

Some consumers want to know the animals were never given antibiotics, even to treat illness. Other consumers are okay with the therapeutic use of antibiotics, meaning that the animals are treated with antibiotics only if they get sick.



You need to decide which is best for you. Any animal fed a low-dose of antibiotics on a continual basis, either to promote growth or to ward off possible disease, is an unsustainable animal that was raised on a factory farm. This should be avoided.

5. How long do dairy cows stay in your herd?

Sustainable dairy operations keep cows for 10 to 15 to years while operations that use rGBH and other supplements wind up replacing the cows every five to seven years. The high cost this replacement entails is one of the reasons that dairy farmers try to market downer cows as meat. And that contributes to mad cow disease.

NOTE: Sustainable farmers are very open about how they raise their animals – If you're not on their farm asking these questions, ask to visit and see exactly how the animals are raised. The vast majority of farmers would love to have you stop by for a visit! Alternatively, if your meat came from a company that distributes products raised by family ranchers, ask for their written protocol (the standards for exactly how the animal was raised). If they won't, you might want to think twice about buying their products.

