

A publication of Hawkeye Foodservice Distribution, Inc.

## Au Naturele

What is a label telling us when it states “Natural Beef”? In today’s modern marketplace there are a lot of marketing niches. Most of these niches revolve around the health conscious consumer. Products boast about no additives, reduced sodium/fat, organic and antibiotic free. When buying in any of these markets it is important to understand what you’re getting. For instance some consumers don’t notice the difference between “fat free” and “reduced fat”. Reduced only means they allow a fraction of the fat from the original recipe. It is up to the consumer to ask “what does your labeling claim mean in regards to the product I’m buying?”

I will focus on the “natural beef” labeling claim. If anyone tries to sell you on buying only natural beef, a loud alarm should go off in your head. The first thing I ask is “what makes your natural beef different from what I’m already buying?” By definition natural beef is: “any product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and is only minimally processed.” Therefore all beef sold is natural. Of course once a manufacture added outside seasonings and marinades – corned beef for example – it is no longer natural. I’m referring to all boxed beef, ground beef, and non-marinated cut steaks.

There is some natural beef on the market that does deserve a higher price tag. For instance, Creekstone Farms produces some of their beef under the “Natural Black Angus Beef” label. What makes their “natural” beef different from what I’m already buying? Cattle that are raised in this program receive no additional hormones and are not given any antibiotics. No, they don’t let their cattle get sick and die. If one of these animals gets sick they will give them antibiotics, but then they are moved into the regular stock and cannot be processed within the natural program. Antibiotic free proteins

are making great gains in the modern marketplace. Researchers are claiming that all the additional antibiotics our children are consuming in their daily meals could be leading to rising healthcare issues. I’m reserving judgment on this, but it is up to each consumer to educate themselves and make these choices personally.

Another possible and justifiable “natural” claim is on grass-feed beef. Grass-feed beef, quite simply, are cattle that only eat grass. All cattle will lead most of their life eating pasture landscapes. However, as popular in the Midwest, most production cattle finish their last two or three months on corn and grain. Grass is a natural part of a cow’s diet. Grain is used to add fat in a quick time frame. Once again, I’ll hold judgment on which beef is better. Research has found that grass-feed beef contains higher levels of omega-3. Omega-3 is a fatty acid commonly found in fish and is important for cell development in our bodies. Omega-3 cannot be replicated and must be consumed through food; often referred to as brain food due to its importance to the human body. The grass-fed beef market is very big in the Western United States in places like Colorado and California. There is also a very distinct flavor difference between these two production methods.

There are needs and demands for “natural” products. But let’s be sure we are getting what we paid for.

### Aaron Scholl

Center of the Plate Buyer/Beef Specialist

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