

Consumer Reports' Food Safety and Sustainability Center's Beef Report Incorrectly Defines Sustainable Beef

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The Beef Report released by Consumer Reports' Food Safety and Sustainability Center investigated the safety of "conventional" and "sustainable" meat products. Cattle raised in "confined systems" represented "conventional" beef in the report, while "sustainable" beef was characterized by cattle raised in organic operations, or cattle that were fed grass-based diets.

The scientific validity and credibility of the report is being challenged by both scientific and industry communities. The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) would like to clarify:

1. the definition of sustainable beef in Canada
2. food safety protocols for meat in Canada; and
3. the responsible use of antimicrobials in sustainable beef production.

Background on the CRSB: The CRSB is a multi-stakeholder organization that has taken on the role of defining sustainable beef in Canada. The CRSB membership consists of members representing all stages of the beef value chain as well as several NGOs that recognize that a well-managed beef industry is integral to maintaining healthy ecosystems. It represents the interests of various production systems.¹

The CRSB maintains that all beef production systems can be sustainable. Many of the sustainable beef production practices identified in the Beef Report are being employed by both conventional and alternative beef production systems, highlighting the diversity in production systems that can be sustainable.

1. Definition of Sustainable Beef

- The CRSB defines sustainable beef as "a socially responsible, environmentally sound and economically viable product that prioritizes Planet, People, Animals and Progress".²
- The CRSB adheres to five Core Principles for sustainable beef production and delivery: 1) Natural Resources; 2) People and the Community; 3) Animal Health and Well-being; 4) Food; and 5) Efficiency and Innovation.³
- Sustainable Beef is achieved when deliverable outcomes focus on the five Core Principles. In no way does the CRSB prescribe to put one production practice over the other in order to achieve these outcomes.
- The Core Principles—and the criteria within them—emphasize the Canadian beef industry's commitment to continuous improvement. They also demonstrate the progress that has been made

to address many of the concerns identified by Consumer Reports with respect to feed, pharmaceutical use, the environment, and animal welfare and feedlot conditions.

- The CRSB does not promote one beef production system over another.

2. Food Safety is A Core Principle of Sustainable Beef

- Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) Principle 4: Global sustainable beef stakeholders ensure the safety and quality of beef products and utilize information-sharing systems that promote beef sustainability.³
- All beef products are subject to the same food safety protocols in Canada. There are no differences in food safety standards for conventionally produced beef and organic or grassfed beef products in Canada.^{4,5}

3. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is addressed in the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB)'s Principles and Criteria

- Along with providing feed, water and shelter, producers have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide appropriate care to sick animals. In some cases that requires antimicrobials. Failing to provide that care puts animal welfare at risk.⁶
- GRSB Principle 3: Global sustainable beef producers and processors respect and manage animals to ensure their health and welfare. GRSB Principle 3 Criteria 3: All veterinary pharmaceuticals and vaccines are used responsibly and in accordance with labeling.
- The CRSB supports the responsible use of antimicrobials. Antimicrobials keep animals healthy by targeting specific microbial pathogens and effectively combating infectious disease, especially when effective vaccines are not available.⁷
- Responsible use means that the antimicrobials are selected in consultation with a vet and are used, stored and disposed of properly. Responsible use is critical to ensuring that these products remain effective for both human and animal medicine.^{7,8}
- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) monitors antimicrobial use in humans and livestock, and antimicrobial resistance in livestock and retail meat. To date, PHAC surveillance indicates that resistance and multi-drug resistance to the antimicrobials most relevant to human health is low in cattle and beef, indicating that Canada's beef cattle producers use these products responsibly.⁸

The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef is highly committed to a rigorous scientific approach. The Roundtable is currently completing a sustainability assessment of the Canadian beef industry and developing indicators to measure sustainable beef production in Canada.

CRSB Contact Information

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References:

¹ Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (2015). About. Retrieved from <http://crsb.ca>

² Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (2015). Governance Overview. Retrieved

from http://crsb.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2015/08/CRSB_Governance-Overview_Approved_2015.pdf

³ Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (2015). Principles and Criteria. Retrieved from http://www.grsbeef.org/Resources/Documents/GRSB%20Principles%20and%20Criteria%20for%20Global%20Sustainable%20Beef_091514.pdf

⁴ Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2014). Meat and Poultry Products. Retrieved from <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/meat-and-poultry-products/eng/1300124955992/1300125034322>

⁵ Beef Cattle Research Council (2015). Q&A on Conventional Production of Canadian Beef. Retrieved from <http://www.beefresearch.ca/blog/qa-on-conventional-production-of-canadian-beef/>

⁶ (2013). Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle. Canadian Cattlemen's Association and National Farm Animal Care Council. Available at https://www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/beef_code_of_practice.pdf

⁷ Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (2015). Antimicrobial Resistance and Use in Beef Cattle Q&A. Retrieved from http://crsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AMR_QA_FINAL.pdf

⁸ Beef Cattle Research Council (2015). Antimicrobial Resistance. www.beefresearch.ca/amr

Additional reference materials:

- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association Antimicrobial Prudent Use Guidelines 2008: http://www.cahi-icsa.ca/uploads/UserFiles/files/CVMA_Prudent_Use_Guidelines_for_Beef,_Dairy,_Poultry_and_Swine_2009.pdf
- Canadian Integrated Program for Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance (CIPARS): <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cipars-picra/index-eng.php>
- Drovers CattleNetwork: [Consumer Reports study confuses serious safety issues, potentially misleading consumers about beef safety](#)
- Health Canada's Veterinary Drugs Directorate: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirgen/hpfb-dgpsa/vdd-dmv/index-eng.php>
- North American Meat Institute: [Consumer Reports Ground Beef Study Confirms Strong Safety of Ground Beef](#)