



Harris Ranch Position Statement -- Hormone Use in Beef Production

2020

Growth promotants, some of which are naturally occurring hormones such as estrogen, are commonly given in small doses to cattle to promote growth of muscle and reduce fat deposits. These growth promoting hormones have been in use in conventional livestock production for over 50 years and are regulated and monitored carefully. They have been proven safe by scientists all over the world including the World Health Organization/Food and Agriculture Organization (WHO/FAO).

Hormone use in beef production means more beef can be produced from fewer cattle and less land. In fact, hormone use reduces the land required to produce a pound of beef by 67 percent – which is part of our industry’s larger story of sustainability.

- In 1970, 140 million head of cattle produced 24 million tons of beef
- By 2015, 90 million (36 percent fewer) head of cattle produced 24 million tons of beef

Globally, the U.S. is the country with the relatively lowest carbon footprint per unit of livestock product produced (i.e. meat, milk or eggs). The reason for this achievement largely lies in the production efficiencies of these commodities. Fewer animals are needed to produce a given quantity of animal protein food.

It is important to realize that all living things contain hormones which are measured in terms of nanograms (ng) – one billionth of a gram. Estrogen is naturally produced by the human body at levels that far exceed what is found in beef as well as many other foods we consume daily. In fact, an adult male produces 136,000 ng of estrogen hormone daily and an adult female produces 480,000 ng of estrogen each day. Millions of women routinely take birth control pills with no verified increase in risk of cancer due to the ingestion of these small doses of estrogen. It is worthy to note that a non-pregnant female can ingest the same amount of estrogen either by taking one birth control pill or by eating 18,421 three-ounce steaks from cattle that had been given a growth promotant.

Harris Ranch does not make a “no hormone” claim because not all of our cattle are source-verified back to the ranch where they were raised. While we don’t know for certain if a growth promotant was administered, their use is fairly common in conventional beef production. What we can say with certainty, however, is at the point of consumption there is virtually no difference in the hormonal content of beef from implanted versus non-implanted cattle. That’s because growth promotants, if administered, are metabolized (used by the body) before the cattle go to slaughter.

A three-ounce serving of beef from a non-implanted steer contains 1.3 nanograms of estrogen hormone compared to 1.9 nanograms found in the same size steak from a beef animal that had received a growth promotant. Because many foods we eat every day and think nothing about (milk, potatoes, peas, ice cream, cabbage, etc.) contain much more estrogen than beef, you can feel confident it’s OK to relax and enjoy your favorite cut of Harris Ranch beef knowing you are consuming a nutrient dense food that is also delicious.