



the ARTISAN BEEF institute™

When we buy a fine wine, at minimum we expect to know the grape variety or blend, the growing region, and the name of the winery. Why don't we expect the same with beef?

Just what is Artisan Beef?

Artisan Beef is like a fine wine and more. A top-notch retailer, butcher, online shop, farm or ranch should be able to answer all of these questions.

Name of Farm: Your beef should be traceable all the way back to the originating farm or ranch. Ask if it was raised in more than one place (e.g. did it spend its last few months with a grass-finisher/grazier or in a feed yard.) The purveyor should be able to tell you the name of each. If the purveyor sources from multiple farms, they should be able to tell you which specific farm(s) produced the beef you are buying.

Breed: Look for a farm that specializes in raising a single breed or crossbreed. There are hundreds of breeds and blends and each has different characteristics. Also, don't be satisfied with "Angus," the term is often used very loosely. If the answer is Angus (or any other breed), ask if it's purebred or a cross breed and the name of the other breed. There is no "best" breed or combination but you do want some consistency in the herd.

Growing Region: Different breeds thrive in different climates or geographical regions. The seller should be able to tell you why the breed or crossbreed is well suited to his or her particular growing region.

Drug Free: Confirm that no antibiotics were used to *prevent* cattle from getting sick and that no supplemental growth hormones were used, *ever*. Some farmers, under advisement from veterinarians, will treat animals that become sick with antibiotics (similar to what we do for ourselves). If you want cattle that have never been treated with antibiotics, you should confirm that the producer segregates & then removes treated cattle from his or her artisan program.

Vegetable Diet: This is a complicated area. At minimum, the feed should be of high quality and clean of any animal, poultry, or fish-based sources. Ask how the purveyor ensures that the feed does not contain any of these by-products.

Low Stress Conditions: Stress - which can be inborn, man-made, or from a natural event - can ruin the taste and texture of beef. This is harder to measure but look for a seller who can tell you the slaughterhouse used and whether low-stress handling was ensured farm to slaughter. Cattle do not like to encounter new experiences. Ask how they move the cattle to a new location and how they prepare them for slaughter to minimize stress. For instance, do they have the cattle practice in chutes or on ramps? In my opinion, cattle should never be yelled at or prodded with an electric current.

Proper Aging & Butchering: The relative talent of the butcher in aging and cutting can have a huge impact on flavor and texture. Aging is critical to tenderness and also enhances flavor. Your beef should have been wet-aged or dry-aged for at least 7 days (and in my opinion, at least 14 days). Dry-aged beef will typically have more intense and layered flavors with distinct notes such as mushrooms or cheese.

Other Criteria To Consider

Certified Humane: There are several independent organizations that review and certify farms, truckers, and slaughterhouses for humane treatment.

Certified Organic: A Certified Organic label means a qualified organization has certified that no pesticides, herbicides or genetically modified organisms were used in producing the beef or the feed for the beef. Some producers may follow organic or near organic practices but not be formally certified.

Pasture Raised & Finished: If you want beef that is raised 100% of its life on pasture, make sure the purveyor can confirm the cattle were both raised and finished on pasture.

Grass-Only Beef: It's important to know that all cattle are grass-fed. Most are finished on a diet of grasses and grains. If you want beef from cattle that never ate grain, ask the purveyor to confirm it was raised on a grass-only diet for 100% of its life.

Seasonality: Beef, especially grass-finished beef, is a seasonal food. Grasses change by season and vary by growing region. When looking for grass-only beef, consider the fact that flavor may vary a bit in different seasons.

Packaging & Freezing: If you are purchasing beef in large quantities (which I strongly advise), look for beef that has been vacuum-sealed in cryovac and flash or blast frozen. Blast (very fast) freezing will minimize if not reduce completely the number and size of ice crystals that can form during the freezing process. Vacuum-sealed packaging will help keep your beef in peak condition in the freezer for a very long time (at least 12 months for steaks). A second best option is beef that has been wrapped in plastic and then again in freezer paper.