

# CLEAN MEAT? NO MEAT?

*By Kassy Kemp, contributing editor*

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Because I am hoping that I have convinced at least some of our readers that the meat sold in our supermarkets is contaminated with carcinogens, I am devoting this month's article to practical solutions for avoiding hormonal meat. Not all health nuts follow the same rules, however, there are three basic approaches to avoiding contaminated meat.

Which brings us to the first class of health nuts: vegetarians. Vegetarians come in all shapes and sizes nowadays. The diet can be just as unhealthy as a typical South Texas meat based diet, consisting of only processed foods, little fresh produce, and too much fat or sweets. A vegetarian diet can also be as extreme as the raw food diet which calls for the majority of food consumption (75% or more) to be raw fruits and vegetables. If you think about that one for a few minutes, it seems pretty drastic. Others are vegans, giving up dairy and eggs as well as meat, fish, and poultry. The interesting thing about vegetarians is that they all emphasize the same dietary element. Vegetarians give up meat, true, but in so doing, they increase their consumption of vegetables by many times the intake of the average meat eater. Especially health-conscious vegetarians use mostly whole grains, whole fruits and vegetables, and low fat or soy based dairy products.

According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), "populations that consume large amounts of plant-derived foods have lower incidence rates of some types of cancer." The article lists these specific cancers as cancers of the esophagus, oral cavity, stomach, colon, rectum, lung, prostate and larynx. It may also affect other cancers as well. (NCI's web site, [http://cis.nci.nih.gov/fact/4\\_5.htm](http://cis.nci.nih.gov/fact/4_5.htm)). Obviously a diet based entirely on vegetables and grains will easily fill these recommendations and more, making a vegetarian diet ideal for cancer prevention. If you consider the health risks that many scientists associate with hormone-treated meats and dairy (see last month's article on hormone-treated meats), vegetarians are also avoiding trouble just by staying away from these products.

However, there are drawbacks to a vegetarian diet. The primary drawback is dealing with the taste that most Americans have developed for meat. Many women (it is mostly women I've come across, not men) who try to introduce a meatless meal to their husbands are not greeted with much enthusiasm. Royce (my husband), who doesn't mind if there is no meat at the table on most nights, will balk if there is tofu in the stir-fry, or if a couple of weeks go by without meat of some sort. He loves the flavors of the meatless meals that I cook, but something about meat itself is enjoyable to him, and he will eventually miss it. I know many women who would like to strike out and learn to cook without meat, but their husbands are not supportive and so vegetarianism as a rule is impractical. The problem that they face is that meat has become so inexpensive and so much a part of our culture on a daily basis, that to even cut back a little can be a big adjustment.

These women often, however, try to substitute as much of the mainstream meats and dairy as they can with natural or organic meats. This is another approach to avoid hormone-treated meat and dairy. Let me speak a word here about the difference between organic meats and natural meats. Organic meats are certified as organic by independent certifying organization(s). They contain no antibiotics, hormones, growth stimulants, veterinary drugs, or other chemicals. The animals are given feed that is not contaminated with pesticides or herbicides.

On the other hand, a meat labeled as "natural" is not usually certified by any organization and the definition of natural has to be looked at by the consumer. Some natural meats simply contain no hormones, but they are treated with antibiotics, veterinary drugs and given feed that is contaminated with pesticides. They may even be fed a non-vegetarian diet which includes animal byproducts. I stress the importance of asking about the product. Many butchers may know the rancher personally or be able to hand you a flyer that provides this information. It cannot hurt to ask, and often times the product that they are offering, will conform to organic standards even though it is not yet certified.

What is difficult with this approach is that the meats from the health food store are often much more expensive and sometimes not consistently available, making it necessary to stock-up during sales and when product is available. The good news is that there are now more suppliers than ever, some products even seem to make it into the supermarkets. Others are popping up as cooperatives where people can combine their buying power and purchase what are normally extremely expensive meats at more reasonable rates. There are even a few mail-order places available which will pack the meat in dry ice and ship it to destinations all over the U.S. These are options available

and I will list some of these suppliers at the end of the article. The more word gets out and the more demand there is, the more will be available and the cheaper it will become.

The final option that I spoke about in avoiding hormone-treated meats and dairy is a combination of the vegetarian diet and occasional organic or natural meats. This is the approach that I have personally taken. It works because there is the freedom to eat meat when it becomes a craving. Plus, it is easy to justify spending a little more for organic or natural meats when you only eat it occasionally.

We have cut back our meat intake to once or twice a week. Some people will only eat meat once a month or less. I don't think it really matters, but I have noticed that too much meat and too little fresh produce will cause us to become constipated or feel bloated. It takes meat twice as long as other foods to be processed through the body, making it essential for plenty of fiber to be present with the meat to make elimination easier.

A common pitfall too with this diet can be an overdependence on dairy products for protein. It is easy to make up the protein in a casserole or other dishes by adding extra cheese or eggs. Of course, this raises the amount of fat (especially saturated fat) in the diet and can also be bad for your health. Legumes, nuts (pine nuts are a great source of protein), seeds, and whole grains provide the basis of vegetarian protein. Combining and utilizing these items takes some practice. Look for a good vegetarian cook book, like the ones mentioned below.

I could go on and give much more research and detailed information on diet techniques, but I think that the most important thing to remember is to avoid all dairy and meat from the grocery store, unless it is at least labeled "hormone-free." Making up your mind to do that is the biggest hurdle. Once you are committed to that kind of diet change, you can work out the particulars to suit your time and taste. In order to facilitate your inevitable search for meat and dairy products that are healthy, I have found the following information on companies that provide meats that are natural and some that are certified organic (much harder to come by down here).

**Ozark Cooperative Warehouse.** A cooperatively-owned distributor of natural foods and other healthy products. They carry over 3,500 products and the prices (for what they carry) are very reasonable, often rivaling mainstream products in the grocery store. I have a coop where I live in Sugar Land, Texas and there are several on down a little south of me. To my knowledge, however, there is none available yet in Corpus Christi. For information on starting a coop in your area contact Ozark Cooperative Warehouse at **501-521-COOP**.

**Edelen Farms** in Alice, Texas carries natural beef. Call **361-668-8615** for more information.

**Straight Meat Co.** in Little River, Texas carries natural beef, natural goat meat, and jerky products that contain no antibiotics, no hormones, no MSG and which are farm raised and grain fed. I called once to ask about their products and I was transferred to "Bubba" who was at the time riding his tractor! Beef is usually ordered in 10lb boxes, however, the meat is individually wrapped in smaller portions (1 pound packages for their ground beef). There is free shipping on 12 pounds or more. Call **1-800-753-4212** for a brochure with prices and ordering information.

**Frans Fryers** carries natural chicken that is grown without hormones. The chickens are fed a pesticide-free diet consisting of soy, rice, corn and vegetable oil. They are not fed any animal fats or animal byproducts, nor are they given antibiotics or dipped in antibacterial rinse. Prices at the time of this writing range from \$0.69 per pound for thigh/ leg quarters and \$3.99 for boneless, skinless breasts. They carry a variety of chicken cuts as well as sausage. Call **972-493-5305** for a brochure with prices and for minimum order requirements, price breaks for large quantity orders, etc.

To order on-line, visit Lasater Grasslands Beef at <http://www.lasatergrasslandsbeef.com/order.html>

## **COOKBOOKS:**

Laurel's Kitchen. written by Laurel Robertson, Carol Flinders, and Brian Ruppenthal. 1993.  
Vegetarian Planet. written by Didi Emmons. 1997.

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