

# Research Brief: Pasture-based Agriculture

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## Overview

Pasture-based livestock agriculture can bring a broad array of benefits to farmers, consumers and their communities. Our research suggests great potential growth in the market for pasture-raised products. Initiatives, such as consumer education, development of alternative supply chains and greater attention from public scholars and policymakers, would expand this market and increase the sustainability of livestock agriculture.

## What is pasture-based livestock agriculture?

Unlike the more common confinement system, animals in the pasture-based system spend the vast majority of their lives outdoors on pasture, and forage for significant portions of their diets. Pasture-based farmers generally forgo the use of hormones and antibiotics, adhering to a more “natural” production philosophy. Research studies suggest that this model:

- ✓ Enhances the animals’ welfare
- ✓ Is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable
- ✓ Can produce meat and dairy products with enhanced human health and nutrition attributes

## Potential for growth

Our research suggests that Michigan consumers greatly value animal products that are raised without hormones and antibiotics, using environmentally friendly and humane animal methods, attributes offered by pasture-raised (PR) products. Our recent study of retail shoppers finds that most consumers believe PR products are better for animal welfare and the environment, and healthier to eat. These consumers also say that when available, they are likely to buy PR products and are willing to pay a premium for them.

## Initiatives

Consumer education and development of alternative supply chains would increase consumers’ ability to differentiate, identify and access these products in the marketplace. Public scholarship and policy can guide and foster these efforts, thereby enhancing the sustainability of livestock agriculture.

## For more information

The Prospects for Pasture-based Agriculture in Michigan: Overview of Findings.  
<http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu/portals/mottgroup/PastureBasedAgOverview.pdf>