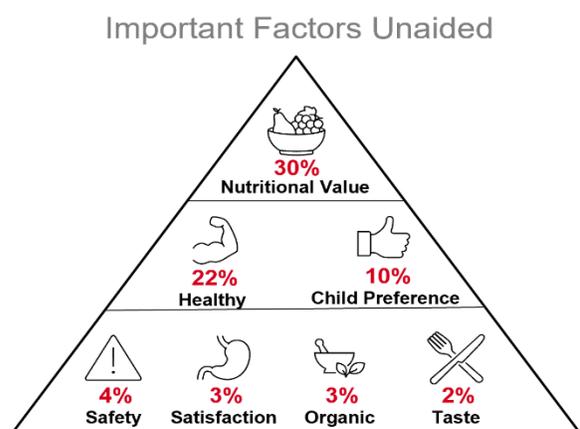


What Parents Think About Introducing Beef as a First Food

Beef is an important complementary food for infants and toddlers during the first few years of life when rapid growth and development occur. Health authorities like the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend animal source foods, like beef, to ensure nutrient needs such as iron and zinc – are met. Proper nutrition is critical during this time, particularly since by 6 months of age iron stores are depleted and breastmilk alone can no longer meet all of the infant’s nutrient requirements. Given the important role beef has in a younger child’s diet, The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff, launched a research project on parents’ feeding habits when their children are 6 to 24 months old. Specifically, the research looked to investigate parents’ perceptions, benefits, and barriers to feeding their child, 24 months or younger, beef.

The research was conducted in August 2020 using an online quantitative survey of 906 parents. Two groups were surveyed to give depth and perspective to the discussion. Group one consisted of 465 parents who currently had a child between six and twenty-four months old; while group two consisted of 441 parents with a child between the ages of two and five. In addition to the children’s age groups parents also had to have some influence on food decisions for their child and be a parent, legal guardian, caregiver, or grandparent. Within the survey, both parents who feed their child beef, and those who do not, were asked similar questions to reveal insights into the benefits and current barriers to feeding their children beef.

One of the major findings in the research was that nutritional value is the most important element when parents are deciding what food to feed their child. When asked, 30% of parents mentioned nutritional value as a top of mind importance factor. Additionally, 82% ranked nutritional value as an important factor when given a broader list of options. While safety did not come up unaidedly, it was ranked as a top importance factor along with nutritional value. Specific to nutritional value, protein, vitamins, and minerals were the top underlying benefits that parents are looking for when deciding what to feed their child.



Despite recommendations to introduce iron rich food sources, like beef, starting around 6 months of age, this research shows that beef introduction is most likely to occur after the age of 12 months, with only about 30% of parents introducing beef before the age of 1. Even though introduction is later than other solid foods, the benefits of feeding beef in the early years are realized by parents. Over half of parents who are feeding their children beef say the top benefit of beef is its nutritional value with 46% saying it supports healthy growth.

