

SUMMARY OF THE 12TH MEAT SYMPOSIUM

7 November 2014

A task team was appointed in 2009 to investigate the current classification system and after a lot of work, including research, it led to this symposium.

Summary of presentations

It was pointed out that there are more factors than only age that influence meat quality.

A number of changes that has happened after the implementation of the current classification system were pointed out:

- Beef carcass weight increased from 210 kg in 1993 to 266 kg in 2013 and this increase could pose new challenges to managing final meat quality
- The use of growth promotors in feedlots became a general practice and probably contributed to an increase in variation in meat quality
- The fat content of carcasses reduced drastically if compared to the values previously used
- 83% of beef slaughtered in the formal sector is from the A class and more than 80% of sheep meat is from the A class

It was mentioned that the consumer wants consistent meat quality (although they do not necessarily know what they want). However, if the consumer demands are to be met, a better description of the product and how it was handled (eg. electrical stimulating, ageing) is required.

Consumers do not understand the system and there is a need for consumer education for them to understand the basic principles of the classification system. However, labelling of the product is also of concern and in very few cases the class of the meat were indicated on the label. However, legislation regarding this aspect has been promulgated to better inform the consumer on e.g. specie, age and fatness level.

The current system does not cater for all the needs, e.g. for that of communal/emerging sector and branding e.g. Grassfed Association. Different systems for different producers and production systems may be required.

Inputs from industry role players

GRASSFED ASSOCIATION:

The system does not allow for the reflection of the true value of their product. There is also discrimination (unfairly) against the yellow fat from beef produced under this system. The classification system should make provision for the classing of fat colour.

RMAA:

The classification system is used for price differentiation on age and fatness and the system should remain as it is. The customer relies more on assurances (branding) by the butcher, retailer, etc. The current classification system is not marketed well.

SAMIC:

SAMIC is not against any change as long as it makes sense. However there must be a need for change and any change must be practical and auditable. The current system is a descriptive system and not a quality system.

TRADE:

A classification system must indicate to the carcass buyer what he buys without seeing the carcass and must also relay a message to the producer and stud breeder what the market wants. Perhaps sheep needs a system of its own – sheep genetics is much more important than in cattle. It is proposed that:

- Separate systems for different species and production systems be investigated
- A 2 dimensional system is to be developed for beef and sheep respectively
- The fatcodes should be simplified since they are outdated

NERPO:

The emerging sector needs a simplified system. There is a lot of knowledge that can be incorporated into a new system. The question is where do you build in this knowledge? Small scale farmers do not relate to the current carcass classification system.

RPO:

RPO indicated that there are currently a lot of controversy about the current system. How can we sell meat on a system that is 30 years old with all the changes that has occurred in the production process? There are a number of problems with the current system.

Any system must be:

- Credible
- Affordable
- Audible
- Manageable - simple as possible
- Consumer friendly

If the colour of the fat is a problem it should be added in a classification system. Red meat is currently losing its market share to poultry.

Conclusion

It was agreed that a workshop with all the role players should be organized to improve the current system, if necessary, for the whole industry and consumers.

- A draft document must be compiled by the research group to: Evaluate the current system in terms of research done
- Identify shortcomings in terms of the existing research and the identified needs of the different role players
- Advise on improvements to the current system taking into consideration that beef and sheep meat be considered separately

The existing paper of Dr Strydom can be used as a starting point for the draft document. This group must also indicate a person who will lead this process under the guidance of our respected Dr RT Naudé.

A working group will then be compiled by representatives of all the role players. Every role player must nominate a representative to the working group who will then evaluate the draft document and come up with recommendation towards an improved classification system.

This will then be referred to the RMIF for consideration.

We take note with much appreciation of Dr Andre Jooste that chaired the process that culminated into the symposium. With that the deliberation work of the group is completed.