

South African Journal of Animal Science

Issue 3, volume 45, 2015

Editorial

Special issue: Relevance of the South African Carcass Classification System

The first Meat Science Symposium was held on the 11th and 12th September 1980 at Woolworths, Cape Town. At the time Dr Raymund Naudé, the then Deputy Director of the former Animal and Dairy Science Research Institute (ADSRI), Irene delivered seven papers. This set a tradition which was continued by the Agricultural Research Council in partnership with other organisations. With the Agricultural Research Council's consent this tradition will now be continued by Red Meat Research and Development South Africa. It is our pleasure therefore to present the 12th Meat Symposium at the University of Pretoria.

The red meat industry was mainly opportunity driven in the 1970's, followed by a more production driven approach in the 1980's. During the 1990's the main emphasis was on costs, while at the turn of the millennium the industry became more consumer driven. The evolution in the red meat industry was characterised by changes in the classification system. In fact, the classification of red meat in South Africa started as early as 1936 when the age of animals was first used as a characteristic to grade carcasses. Over time these description systems have been adopted and refined as informed by research in consultation with industry role players. The red meat industry in South Africa has evolved significantly since the 1970's. The time has now come for us to critically rethink the relevance of the current carcass classification system which will, therefore, be the theme of the day.

In a paper by Dr Phillip Strydom (2011) a timeline of the development of the red meat classification system in South Africa was provided. In the same paper the general aims and objectives of carcass classification or grading systems were mentioned as:

- To provide a common language for use by those trading in livestock and carcasses to facilitate trade and intensify competition;
- To develop clearer market signals from the consumer to the producer by using premiums for desirable stock and discounts for less desirable stock;
- To act as a catalyst for breed and national herd/flock improvement;
- To act as a framework for the development of national price reporting schemes to enable those trading (and others such as statutory organisations) to determine which prices were paid for differing types of stock in different areas;
- To assist producers to market their stock more effectively, aided by better 'market transparency';
- To improve efficiency in transactions in what is today referred to as the 'supply chain' between producer, slaughterer and retailer; encouraging the use of buying specifications that could be filled and verified against classification descriptions;
- To allow those cutting meat to monitor and control their operations on a yield basis. Classification has a direct relationship to the amount of saleable meat in a carcass. Yields and returns from cutting and processing can therefore be predicted and monitored with a knowledge of the classification of the carcass raw material;
- To promote, by the marking or labelling of classification/grading, information on meat up to the point of retail sale, a basis for 'quality' marks or promotional brands;
- To facilitate the development of any export markets.

Within the ambit of the aforementioned, in recent years various industry stakeholders has started to question the adequacy of the existing red meat classification system in South Africa, i.e. whether the current system should be maintained, amended or changed completely. Such enquiries are not unreasonable seen against recent research in this area and publically available information such as:

"The South African red meat classification system only allows for classification of meat based on age and fat covering. Other attributes like for example tenderness, consistency and overall quality of product is not guaranteed by a certain class of meat." Sparta website (<http://www.sparta.co.za/products-and-recipes/red-meat-classification-13353>)

According to SAMIC, meat classification provides for a sound basis for: (<http://www.samic.co.za/downloads/Redmeat.pdf>)

- *Meat traders to describe their carcasses in simple terms for purchasing.*
- *The use of variety in the market for optimal consumer satisfaction.*
- *Price differences.*
- *Determination of sales prices.*

Following on the aforementioned industry stakeholders convened in October 2009 to discuss the existing red meat classification system in South Africa. Industry stakeholders agreed to establish a study group consisting of researchers to investigate the current classification system. The research team convened in April 2010 and recommended that the following issues must, amongst others, be addressed:

- A literature review encompassing, amongst others, the ability of the classification system to predict the impact of factors influencing quality of the product, a global overview of classification and grading systems, an overview of changing consumer needs and trends and indicate shortcomings of the local system, but also global systems and techniques available to predict and describe characteristics that influence consumer demands.
- A survey to investigate the South African consumers' perception towards red meat.
- Research should be conducted on unsolved issues that will be forthcoming from the literature survey, which could include, but not limited to (a) factors involved in variation of product quality other than those included in the current classification system, and (b) the ability/efficiency of new methods to describe or predict quality according to the needs of the industry and/or consumer

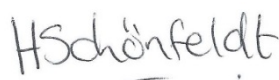
Subsequently, the Red Meat Research and Development system through which red meat research in the industry is governed, was used to action research on this topic by an open call for submission of proposals. All researchers working at recognised research institutions are eligible to apply for funding. The first preliminary research results were discussed in December 2013 by the research team, followed by another meeting inclusive of other researchers than the research team. At this meeting it was agreed that stakeholders should be informed collectively on the results of research. The result is the 12th Meat Symposium with the theme of "Relevance of the South African Carcass Classification Systems" and publication of the research as peer-reviewed papers in a special edition of the South African Journal of Animal Science.

A panel of prominent scientists has been used to peer-review the papers submitted. We would like to extend a sincere word of thanks and appreciation to the reviewers for giving their time and expertise in undertaking this significant task:

Prof A. Hugo, Microbial Biochemical and Food Biotechnology, University of the Free State, South Africa
 Prof M.M. Scholtz, Animal Production Institute, Agricultural Research Council, South Africa
 Prof E. van Marle-Köster, Department of Animal and Wildlife Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa
 Dr H.H. Meissner, Private consultant, Centurion, South Africa
 Dr L. Simela, CEO National Emergent Red Meat Producers' Organisation, Pretoria, South Africa
 Dr L. Frylinck, Animal Production Institute, Agricultural Research Council, South Africa
 Prof V. Muchenje, Livestock & Pasture Science, University of Fort Harare, South Africa
 Prof F.K. Siebrits, Department of Animal Sciences, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa
 Dr R.T. Naudé, Private consultant, Centurion, South Africa
 Dr A. Jooste, Chairperson: Red Meat Research and Development Trust Project Committee, Pretoria, South Africa

Acknowledgement

Finally, we want to thank all those that provided input and guidance into the process to date, and in particular the research team that consisted of Dr Phillip Strydom, Dr Arno Hugo, Dr Lorinda Frylinck, Dr Ina van Heerden, Prof Eddie Webb, Prof Hettie Schönfeldt and Ms Hester Vermeulen. Our appreciation also goes out to the researchers that supported the research team, as well as to Carina Haasbroek and Dr Beulah Pretorius who always willingly and professionally supported this initiative in terms of administration and logistics.



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