Why Should Commercial Producers Improve Lean Meat Yield?

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Lambs are normally sold on farm or in saleyards on a per head basis and/or direct to processors on carcase pricing grids, using weight and fat tissue depth. These measures are poor predictors of final carcase Lean Meat Yield Percentage (LMY %) and value to the customer is not distributed accurately along the value chain. This results in unclear market signals to producers, because the price grids have no capacity to reflect value to the end consumer.

For producers at present, LMY % is not commonly measured or paid for, however there are good reasons why producers should aim to improve the LMY % of their flock. Across a number of breeds, research has shown that fast growth and high muscle sires produce progeny with better feed conversion efficiency. These lambs will reach target weights quicker, requiring less feed thus reducing production costs. In addition, these lambs can be finished to heavier weights without becoming overly fat and accruing penalties. This results in larger margins and higher profits to the grower.

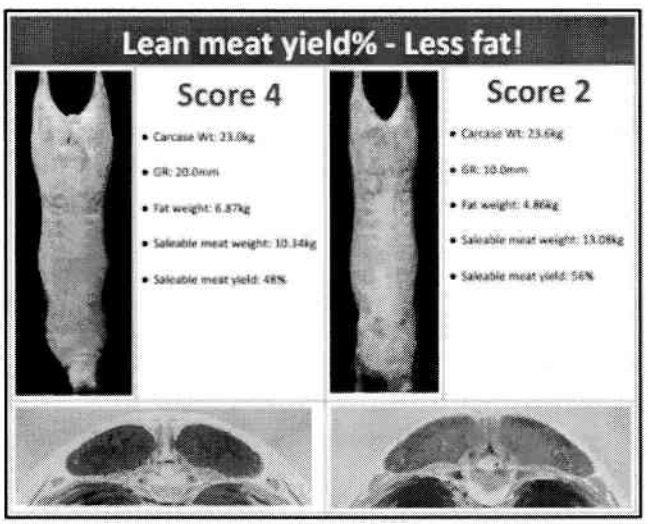
Improvements in LMY % will become increasingly more important for producers if processors and retailers can easily measure and therefore provide clear market signals discriminating for fat. With the advancements in new agricultural technologies LMY % testing equipment for example Hyperspectral imaging (HSI) will become cheaper and easier for processors to use. With the introduction of technologies like this, rapid changes will be implemented with price signals quickly passed onto producers.

The new Lamb Eating Quality (LEQ) index developed in May 2016 will lead to improved eating quality while increasing LMY %, provided stud producers are carrying out genomic testing on young rams. Genomic testing provides increased selection accuracy on key carcase and eating quality traits such as intramuscular fat and shear force, which enables breeders to partly overcome the antagonism between LMY % and eating quality. LMY % will boost commercial producer's profits, allowing them to grow and turn off prime lambs quicker and cheaper.

Producers should be aware that processors will soon reward by paying premiums for lambs with higher saleable meat yield.

As an example, the figure shows two (2) carcases from the Sheep Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) flock that had similar carcase weight (23.0 and 23.6kg) but different fat scores (2 and 4 respectively) and considerable differences in GR fat (110mm from the mid-line over 12th rib on the sheep) and saleable meat yield. The fat score 2 lamb had 10mm fat at the GR site and 56% saleable meat, whereas the fat score 4 animal had 20mm fat and 48% saleable meat; the leaner animal produced 2kg more lean meat than the fat animal.

(Data courtesy of Sheep CRC)



References

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