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SPA May Update



Product Integrity

- Chemical Intramuscular Fat Standards

The Product Integrity Committee had its meeting on 17 May to discuss a wide range of issues ranging from chemical intramuscular fat (IMF%) grading language, increasing the uptake of the eNVD, and the exploration of a national electronic tag tender for the sheep industry.

Chemical Intramuscular Fat Standards

The Committee recommended their support for a proposal seeking to establish the IMF% trait as a trading/grading language as the reference standard for lamb carcass grading and trading language. This will provide a method for the standardised calibration, accreditation and auditing of emerging technologies that aim to predict chemical IMF% in Australian lamb and sheepmeat. IMF% is the measure of the chemical fat percentage in the loin muscle of lamb, where the visible component is known as marbling. Research shows that IMF% has a very strong correlation with eating quality.

Currently, lamb carcass grading is based only on carcass weight and Grade Rule (GR) tissue depth or fat score, with no method of directly or indirectly identifying or segregating lamb carcasses based on eating quality. The beef industry uses the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) beef grading scheme to grade individual cuts within the carcasses. The MSA grading scheme uses a range of variables known to influence eating quality, including marbling score. For the lamb industry to implement a similar MSA model, commercially available technologies that predict chemical IMF% at processing line-speed are required. Therefore, to further progress the production and delivery of commercial solutions, the IMF% needs to be agreed to as a new trait for the lamb and sheepmeat grading language.

SPA would like to see the lamb industry measuring lean meat yield (LMY) as calculated by DEXA and IMF% measured at chain speed during processing so consumers can be guaranteed a quality product; producers can adjust their ram selection for a balance between yield and eating quality in the lambs they produce; and processors can optimise boning, target specific markets and potentially reward producers.