

DISTRIBUTION OF LAMB CARCASSES ACCORDING TO WEIGHT AND FATNESS

K. L. PIRLOT^a, D. L. HOPKINS[®] and A. H. K. ROBERTS^a

^aTasmanian Dept of Primary Industry, PO. Box 180, Kings Meadows, Tas. 7249.

[®]Present address NSW Agriculture, P.O. Box 242, Cowra, N.S.W. 2794.

There is evidence to show that consumers are demanding leaner and meatier cuts of lamb (Thatcher 1988). The development of boneless lamb cuts, low in fat and high in lean meat are aimed at meeting these consumer requirements. The Elite lamb program has been developed to meet consumer needs and reinstate lamb as a desirable product (Pollard 1990). An Elite lamb carcass is 22-26 kg with a fat score of 2 or 3. The actual number of carcasses that would meet the specification in Tasmania was unknown. To address this issue records were obtained from a local processor and the results are reported here.

Table 1 presents records for 12 months which were obtained from a local export meat works for the period November 1989 to October 1990. Compiled for this period were records for 108028 lambs. The data were recorded on the AUS-MEAT (Authority for Uniform Specification Meat and Livestock) computer system AMIS. The information used was hot standard carcass weight (kg) and fat score, based on the GR measurement (tissue depth over the 12th rib, 110 mm from the midline). No distinction was made between the sexes. The compiled data showed that the majority of carcasses weighed within the range 14.1-20 kg. There were 5095 carcasses that fell into the 22-26 kg bracket, with only 626 animals meeting the Elite specifications of fat score 2 or 3. The number of Elite lambs processed was extremely low, approximately 0.5% of total lambs slaughtered.

Table 1. Number of carcasses for Nov. 1989 to Oct. 1990 according to weight and fat score

Weight range (kg)	Fat score					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
8-14	4799	7835	816	94	26	13 570
14.1-22	3777	35 250	26 661	14 625	8540	88 853
22.1-26	22	168	458	1503	2944	5095
> 26	4	20	32	52	402	510
Total	8602	43 273	27 967	16 274	11 912	108 028

It is evident from the information gathered that as the weight of the animal increased there was a positive trend for the fatness of the animal to increase. Of the heavier carcasses the majority were fat score 4 or 5. Methods to help shift the present distribution are possible. Assuming that half of the carcasses were castrate males (2224 score 4 or 5) it would be possible by rendering these males short scrotum to bring these animals into the fat score 2 or 3 range. It is documented (Hopkins *et al.* 1990) that short scrotum lambs tend to be leaner at heavier weights than **wethers**. Emphasis on direct sales to processors may also increase the number of Elite lambs as the **saleyard** system tends to favour the fatter animal

Elite lamb is currently difficult to acquire in Tasmania with only a minute percentage suiting the desired specifications for weight and fatness. It is apparent that to increase the number of Elite lambs specific strategies will need to be employed covering production and market considerations.

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