

## COMMUNIQUE

For immediate release

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### Beef and Lamb/Mutton Meat Carcass Classification System

During the past few years the relevance of the current beef and sheep carcass classification system has been questioned by some industry role players. A task team was duly appointed in 2009 to revisit the carcass classification system. The 12<sup>th</sup> Meat Symposium was held on 7 November 2014 to present and share relevant research findings ([www.rmrdsa.co.za/Meatsymposiums/201412thMeatSymposium.aspx](http://www.rmrdsa.co.za/Meatsymposiums/201412thMeatSymposium.aspx)). The research papers presented at the Symposium were of a very high standard, but did not prove conclusively that a change to the present classification system was warranted due to a wide range of variables. It was agreed at this Symposium that a further workshop be held with all the industry role players to further interrogate if the current system could be improved and how. This workshop was held on 1 March 2016 as of this decision.

The most important changes that have occurred since the initial implementation of the current classification system were:

- 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 promoters in both intensive and extensive production systems has now become a general practice and probably also contributed to an increase in variation in meat quality;
- The fat content of carcasses has reduced drastically when compared to the historical values; and
- The manner in which the product was processed at the abattoir and retailer (e.g. electrical stimulating, ageing) has changed.

During the workshop an opinion was expressed that the current management, production and processing practises should be improved to assure the consumer of higher quality products.

There was, however, consensus that amending the current beef and lamb/mutton meat classification system would not address these issues. The Red Meat Industry agreed that the current beef and lamb/mutton classification system is still relevant.

The following aspects need attention, if final product quality is to be improved and better understood:

- Consumer awareness and education of the classification system and other related systems;
- Labelling and branding; and
- More attention to the post harvesting processes, e.g. electrical stimulation and chilling, which should include better education at the abattoirs where proper knowledge may be lacking.

Other issues that need to be discussed include:

- The possible inclusion of a fat colour code in the classification system; and
- While the use of beta agonists in production remained contentious, it would be appropriate if the use thereof was interrogated by all industry role players and scientists.

The valuable inputs of the researchers were crucial in understanding red meat quality and the factors affecting it and are acknowledged. Red Meat Research and Development South Africa is acknowledged for their co-ordinating role.

It was emphasized again that the classification system was a carcass description system and not a quality assurance system. It is similar to the system used by the USDA and the conventional Australian system. The voluntary MSA (Meat Standards Australia) system is one of a few systems that described quality, but it remains too expensive to implement in South Africa.

*ISSUED FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE RED MEAT INDUSTRY*

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