

tips & tools



MSA01

MEAT STANDARDS AUSTRALIA

What is MSA?

Meat Standards Australia (MSA) is a valuable asset to the Australian beef industry, providing opportunities to differentiate product in the market. Unlike existing industry description systems, MSA accurately predicts eating quality for individual beef muscles.

The complex series of factors which result in the eating quality of a beef meal are taken into account in the MSA production and grading process. This solves the long-standing consumer problems of selecting beef and choosing an appropriate cooking method.

Beef purchasing by consumers

The MSA labels provide a consumer assurance of eating quality at three levels, MSA 3, 4 and 5 in conjunction with cooking method.

This is all the consumer needs to know to purchase and prepare beef with confidence.

Application of the system can provide a dynamic new consumer focus and drive positive change in beef industry trading systems. At retail, description by final eating quality result can be linked to price and replace the complex and often misleading system of cut names and quality descriptions now used. Relating MSA grade results to price along the production chain can encourage and reward production systems that aid in improving consumer acceptance of beef.

Replacing variable quality with accurate eating quality grades can underpin branded beef programs and provide a basis for improved demand with an associated shift in price and volume.

Key points

- MSA removes the need for consumers to have specialist beef knowledge.
- MSA retail labels advise the correct cooking method for every piece of beef to assure the eating quality result.
- MSA product must meet consumer set standards at one of three quality levels: MSA 3, MSA 4 or MSA 5.
- MSA involves all sectors of the beef production chain, from paddock to plate.
- MSA provides detailed feedback on eating quality to the processor, feedlot and the producer.



ROAST



CASSEROLE



STIR FRY



THIN SLICE



GRILL / PAN FRY



SHABU SHABU



YAKINIKU



CORN



How did MSA begin?

MSA began as an industry program in 1996 following detailed consumer research investigating the continuing decline in beef consumption.

The key problems identified in MSA research were a reduced level of cut and cooking knowledge among consumers and the degree of quality variation in the beef available. The period of beef consumption decline coincided with growth in competitive products offering greater consistency and less demanding product knowledge. While relative pricing had also changed, consumers stated they would buy more beef, even at higher prices, if it was reliable.

The consumer standard

A total consumer focus has been the foundation of MSA development. The objective has always been to accurately establish and satisfy consumer set standards. Early MSA research investigated consumer taste parameters to establish the degree of variation between consumers. Grading could not be effective without a reasonable consensus view of eating quality. The findings established that there was very strong agreement on beef eating quality among consumer groups. From this, protocols were established to utilise consumers in testing the full range of beef produced. The scoring system and boundaries to define grades have been strictly set from analysis of the consumer results.

All MSA beef is graded on the basis of the consumer test score predicted for a particular beef muscle cooked by the nominated method. Further information on consumer testing and grade standards is available in *MSA Tips & Tools: How MSA grades are determined*.

How is the MSA grade established?

The MSA grade is established by calculating the direct and interactive effects of all factors established as affecting eating quality. More than 100,000 consumers, across nine countries have participated in MSA consumer testing providing scores on more than 800,000 beef samples. A very large database contains details of the consumer scores for each cut in conjunction with product information. This includes the animal's breed, sex, age and growth history, detailed processing and chiller assessment data together with the individual cut and muscle, days of ageing and cooking method tested.

Analysis of this data has established a series of factors which, when used in combination, allow the consumer score to be predicted with reasonable accuracy. No single factor is all-important, which is why grades based entirely on breed, dentition, marbling or other single attributes fail to assure eating quality. Virtually all steps in the production process have some impact on the eventual consumer result.

The MSA-accredited graders collate information provided from the cattle supplier, through the MSA vendor declaration, with abattoir information and chiller assessment detail. The data is entered into a handheld computer that enables a complex statistical calculation to be made estimating the interactive effect of all factors on eating quality. Information on each carcass is provided to the abattoir and the supplier in MSA feedback.

The program then produces an eating quality score specific to each muscle for each applicable cooking method, covering ageing periods from 5–35 days. This determines how the product can be identified to the consumer. Individual carcasses are sorted into eating quality groups. Eating quality groups collate carcasses that share cuts within specified eating quality ranges to enable accurate carton labelling. Further details on the eating quality calculation process, the grading procedure and each grading input may be obtained in other MSA tips and tools.

How is MSA integrity maintained?

MSA is a voluntary cooperative program requiring coordination and rewarding best practice across all industry sectors. Producers and feedlots are registered and provide required information via an MSA vendor declaration. Abattoirs, wholesalers, retailers and foodservice outlets are licensed and incorporate MSA requirements into their quality assurance programs. The licence conditions require independent auditing to demonstrate total product integrity. MSA grader accuracy is monitored through frequent analysis and MSA graders are required to complete regular correlations against the grading standards. Consumer complaints are monitored and investigated as required.

For more information

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