



NLRS sheep assessing

The National Livestock Reporting Service (NLRS) has a proud history of providing accurate and timely market information.

The NLRS comprises a head office team, based in North Sydney, and 21 livestock market officers (LMO) scattered throughout regional Australia.

LMOs attend 30 sheep and lamb markets throughout Australia each week – collecting, collating and analysing market data. All LMOs are regularly assessed to ensure they maintain their national accreditation as livestock assessors. To be certain that a statistically valid data sample is being collected at each sale, LMOs must record a minimum of 70% of the total stock offered for sale. In reality, the introduction of new technologies has allowed coverage to average closer to 90%.

How the NLRS assess sheep and lambs

Sheep and lambs are sold in drafted consignments or pen lots. In saleyards, they are sold in dollars per head while those sold direct are usually sold on a carcass weight price per kilogram basis.

When assessing lambs, NLRS LMOs must consider several factors including age, breed, sex, carcass weight, fat score, skin value and finally overall quality

and condition. Table 1 (sheep and lamb categories) depicts the factors used to determine age and sex of sheep and lambs.

Breed and market destination are also used to classify sheep and lambs. The following precursors are used to further define the market. The bulk of the lamb market consists of prime lambs (second cross lambs). These are bred from a first cross ewe and British meat breed ram. These have no precursor on an NLRS report.

- RS** Sheep or lambs purchased by restocker, either to be re-fattened or kept for future breeding
- FD** Lambs purchased by lot feeders
- MR** Merino sheep or lambs
- RM** Merino sheep or lambs purchased by restockers
- 1X** The result of a Merino crossed with a British meat breed
- LE** Stock purchased by live exporters

Table 1 Sheep and lamb categories

Category	Description
Young lamb	Male and female lambs with no 'ram like' characteristics. Generally suckers, unshorn with no permanent teeth, normally up to 5 months of age.
Lamb	Male and female lambs with no 'ram like' characteristics. Generally weaned, shorn with no permanent teeth and normally older than 5 months of age.
Hogget	Castrated male or female sheep with no 'ram like' characteristics and up to 2 permanent teeth.
Ewe	Female with more than 2 permanent teeth.
Wether	Castrated male sheep with no 'ram like' characteristics and with more than 2 permanent teeth.
Ram	Ram and castrated male sheep with 'ram like' characteristics.

Table 2 Fat scores

Score	1	2	3	4	5
GR tissue depth (mm)	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
Assessment over the long ribs	Individual ribs felt very easily. Can not feel any tissue over the ribs.	Individual ribs easily felt, however some tissue is present.	Individual ribs can still be felt. Can feel more tissue over the ribs.	Can only just feel ribs. There is fluid movement of tissue.	Ribs can not be felt. Tissue movement is very fluid.
Dressing percentage	41%	43%	45%	47%	49%

Dressing percentages are for second cross lambs. Data supplied by NSW Agriculture.

Fat score

Fat score is the fat measurement on the carcass based on the actual soft tissue depth at the GR site. The GR site is 110mm from the midline over the 12th rib.

Fat scores range from 1 (leanest) to 5 (fattest). Each fat score represents a 5mm band width. As a general rule, at the same weight, ewe lambs will be fatter than wether lambs which will in turn be fatter than ram or cryptorchid lambs.

The five fat scores are shown in Table 2.

Figure 1 Best position to assess fat on sheep and lambs

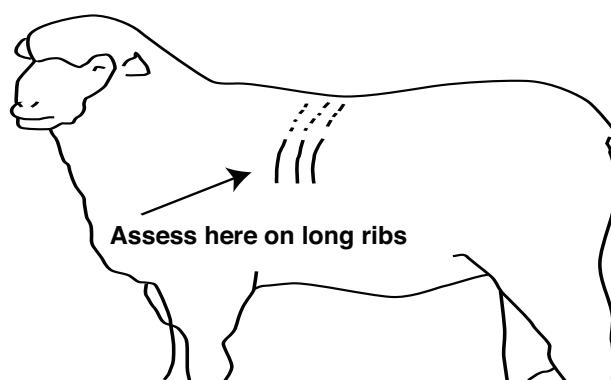


Figure 2 Location of the GR site

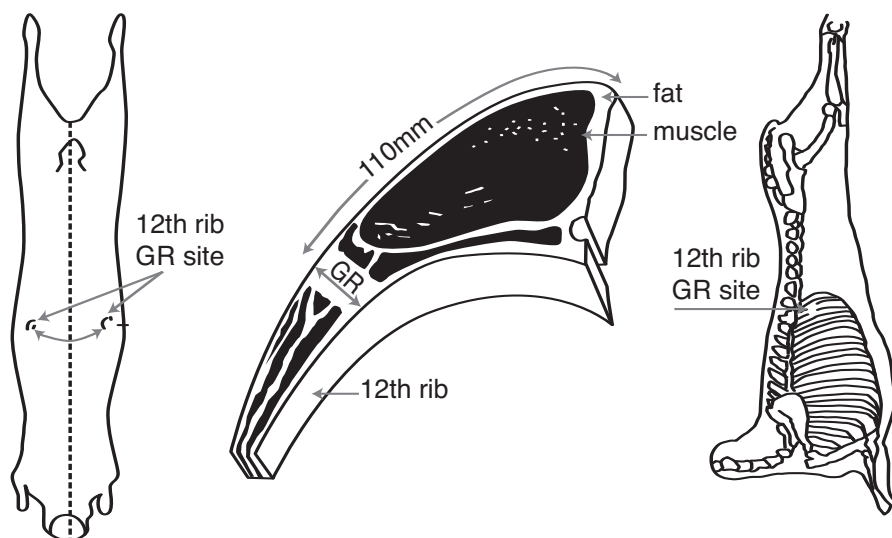


Table 3 Conversions between dollars per head and cents per kilogram

	Per head value (\$/head)	Skin value (\$/skin)	Average weight (kg)	\$/head – \$/skin carcase weight	Meat value (¢/kg)
Trade lamb	75.00	10.00	19	$\frac{75.00 - 10.00}{19}$	342
Export lamb	87.00	11.50	24	$\frac{87.00 - 11.50}{24}$	315



Carcase weight

Carcase weight refers to the 'hot standard carcase weight' (HSCW) which is the weight of the carcase within two hours of slaughter. LMOs need to determine the weight conversion from the animal standing before them to the carcase from that animal.

The carcase weight usually determines which area of the market the product will fall into. Light lambs under 16kg are commonly referred to as 'side lambs', as they are usually sold as complete sides of lamb at retail level, or purchased by feeders and restockers for fattening/breeding. Lambs of this weight are also suitable for exporting to the Middle East. Trade lambs usually range between 18 and 22kg.

Export type lambs are generally those over 22kg, with heavier lambs over 24kg preferred.

Skin value

Estimation of the skin value is an important factor when assessing sheep and lambs. Skins can vary greatly in value depending on supply and quality, consequently impacting on the carcase weight price. Heavy seed and burr content and indiscriminate crutching can lead to discounts of up to 50% on skin's value. The value of the skin on the live animal is assessed against current market values issued in a weekly report prepared by NLRS, based on what skin traders are paying for the week.

Calculating carcase weight price

Being able to make the conversion from dollars per head to cents per kilogram requires the use of simple mathematics and three key elements – the actual dollar per head price, the estimated skin value and the estimated carcase weight in kilograms.

Table 3, above, shows an example of conversions to arrive at the carcase weight value of a lamb.



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