



Meat Standards Australia
ANNUAL OUTCOMES

R E P O R T

The word "REPORT" is written in large, bold, white capital letters. Each letter is filled with a different photograph related to the meat and livestock industry: 'R' shows a black cow in a field; 'E' shows a man in a blue shirt and hat; 'P' shows a white sheep; 'O' shows a man in a blue shirt and hat; 'R' shows a sheep in a pen; 'T' shows a man in a blue shirt and hat.

2015-16

**Producing excellence in
eating quality**

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MEAT STANDARDS
GRADED

Overview

With more than three million cattle and five million sheep graded through Meat Standards Australia, the program created an additional \$153 million in farm gate returns this financial year.

The cattle and sheep presented for MSA grading represented 38% of the national adult cattle slaughter and 23% of lamb slaughter.

In the face of tough climatic conditions, cattle graded during 2015-16 achieved 92.7% compliance to MSA minimum requirements.

The inaugural Australian beef eating quality audit was released this year, establishing for the first time in Australian history, the baseline for beef eating quality. See more on page 12.

2015-16 was a year of firsts for MSA with the inaugural MSA producer awards held around the country. The top producers in each state were honoured for their outstanding compliance to MSA minimum requirements. Head to page 32 to read their stories.





MSA five year strategy



Michael Crowley

Under its new five-year plan the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) eating quality program is aiming to ensure all cattle in Australia will be eligible for MSA grading to enable their eating quality to be accurately described and a cuts based model for sheepmeat implemented.

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) has led the development of the MSA program, which has grown to the point that 3.1 million head of cattle were graded in, 2015-2016, or 38 per cent of the national adult cattle slaughter. Our sights are set on MSA grading over 50 per cent of all cattle slaughtered by 2020.

This will be achieved through a range of strategies outlined in the new five-year plan. Growth in both the beef and sheepmeat programs will be driven by supporting brands in underpinning their products with an MSA endorsement of eating quality.

Investment in research that improves accuracy of the MSA model and covers all pathways, cattle types and production methods will be key to achieving these ambitious goals.

And by empowering brand owners to drive the success of MSA globally, we are confident we can continue to drive benefits from paddock to plate.

Over the last five years the MSA eating quality program has expanded to continuously increase as a proportion of cattle slaughtered in Australia, with 1.34 million head of cattle graded in 2010-11 rising to 3.1 million in 2015-16 in line with commercial incentives, as shown by an increase in young cattle premiums which have risen from \$0.15c/kg to \$0.24c/kg, and retail premiums across key primals of \$1.73/kg in 2015-16.

Similarly, the MSA sheepmeat program has grown from 880,000 lambs in 2010-11 to 5.2 million in 2015-16 following MSA pathways. In 2015-16 there were 45,217 MSA registered producers supplying





54 MSA licensed processors, 140 MSA licensed brands, and 3,743 MSA licensed wholesaler, foodservice and retail outlets.

Our goal is to increase supply through these supply chains with a goal of more than 60,000 MSA registered cattle and sheep producers by 2020.

The demonstrated outcomes of the MSA program and return on investment to producers are proof that the program has been successful, but we want to grow further.

This includes identifying on-farm practices and tools that help producers increase the eating quality of their livestock and improve compliance to both MSA and company specifications.

As MSA moves from delivering domestic eating quality solutions to globally focussed outcomes, we will seek to enhance the characteristics of the trusted MSA quality mark, which is the

authoritative symbol that underpins the eating quality of beef and sheepmeat brands.

And it goes without saying that the MSA program will remain underpinned by world leading science.

The plan features ongoing investment in research, as well as a focus on continued improvement of MSA's integrity systems, and more efficient, accurate and transparent grading through development and adoption of objective carcass measurement technologies.

The new five-year plan has been developed in close consultation with the peak industry councils through the MSA beef and sheepmeat taskforces representing producers, processors, brand owners and end users.





MSA increased its share of the national cattle slaughter by 4% to 38% in 2015-16, even during the decline of national cattle slaughter.



MSA beef

MSA graded cattle represented 38% of the national adult cattle slaughter in 2015-16, increasing 4% from the previous year. 3.1 million cattle were graded this financial year through 43 licensed beef processors.

New South Wales experienced the strongest growth, increasing their MSA grading numbers to almost one million head.

By volume Queensland continues to claim the highest number of MSA graded cattle, while MSA accounts for more than 60% of both the South Australian and Tasmanian cattle slaughter.

An additional 2409 beef producers registered to become eligible to supply into the MSA program.

Chart 1: National MSA beef grading numbers

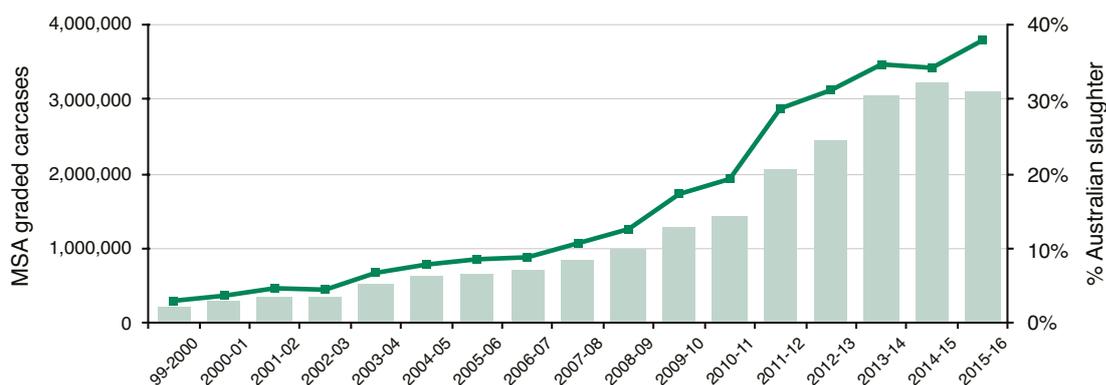
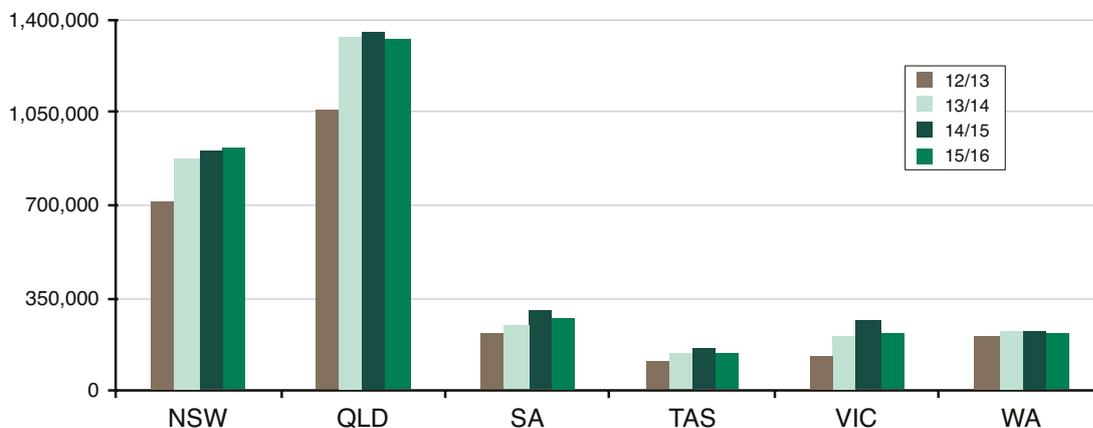


Chart 2: MSA beef in all states



Beef carcass compliance

In the face of tough climatic conditions cattle graded during 2015-16 achieved 92.7% compliance to MSA minimum requirements, a decrease of less than 0.05% when compared to 2014-15.

Grassfed cattle represented 49% of MSA graded cattle with 88% compliance to MSA minimum requirements while grainfed carcasses had 98% compliance.

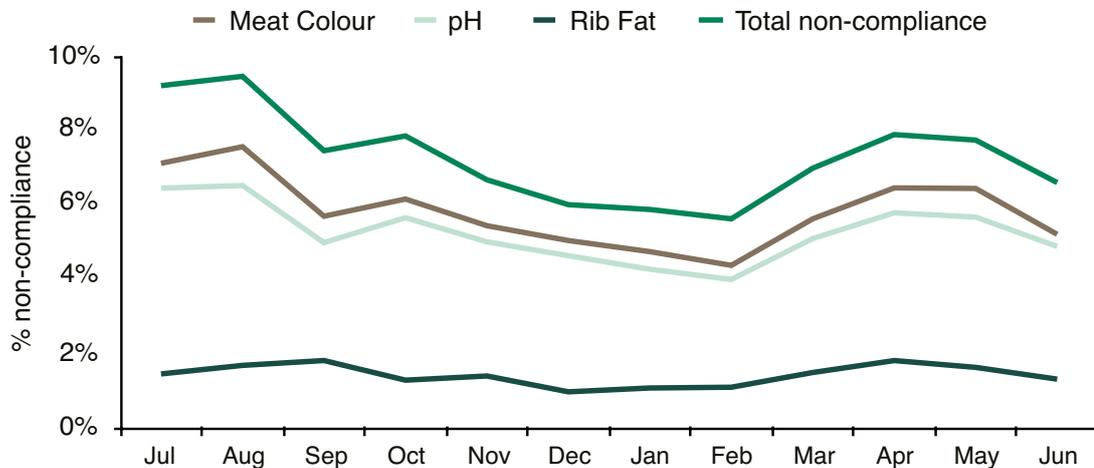
Compliance rates vary according to season changes in different regions around Australia. August had the highest rate of non-compliance for the year at just shy of 10%.

Of the carcasses graded against MSA standards...

- ➔ 5.26% had pH levels exceeding 5.7
- ➔ 5.85% did not meet the meat colour specification of 1B to 3
- ➔ 1.46% had less than 3mm rib fat

In 2015-16, an additional 3% of MSA graded cattle did not meet company-imposed specifications.

Chart 3: Reason for non-compliance 2015-16





*Cattle graded during
2015-16 achieved
92.7% compliance
to MSA minimum
requirements...*



MSA Index

The average MSA index for 2015-16 for MSA carcasses graded throughout Australia and that met MSA minimum requirements was 57.52. The average MSA index for grassfed and grainfed cattle was 58.50 and 56.66 respectively.

The MSA index is a single value between 30 to 80 applied to a carcass to represent potential eating quality. This is calculated based on the eating quality performance of 39 major cuts within the carcass. Higher index values indicate higher eating quality.

The index aims to provide more meaningful eating quality feedback to producers. To support MSA feedback, the online tool myMSA was made available to producers to easily access feedback reports, MSA index performance and more customised reporting. The number of myMSA logins has increased by 97%, as 3182 producers used myMSA more than 10,000 times.

67% of all producer registrations were lodged online and almost 2500 producers completed the online training program.

What does the MSA Index look like?

Each carcass is assigned an Index between 30 and 80 based on eating quality outcomes of 39 cuts in a carcass.

Use the MSA Index calculator at www.mymssa.com.au/msamobile

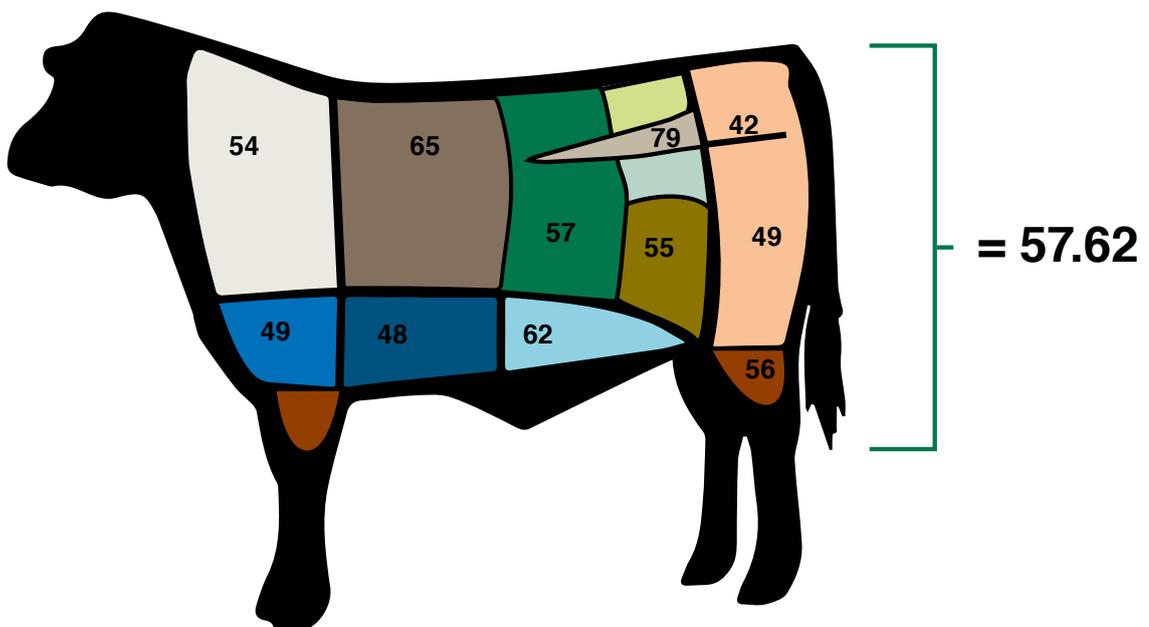


Illustration for example purposes only



Chart 4: MSA Index over time

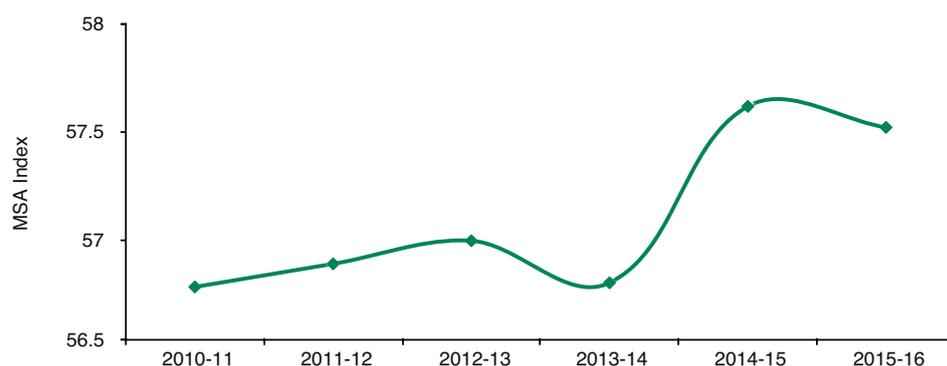


Chart 4 shows the change in the MSA index over time. Since 2010/11, the MSA index of MSA graded cattle nationally, has increased 0.76 with a slight decrease in 2015/16 from the previous year.

MSA Index 2015-16 percentile bands

Band	Index	
1	66.07	→ Top 1%
5	63.72	
10	62.55	→ Top 10%
25	60.59	
50	57.78	
75	54.97	
90	52.13	
95	49.53	→ Bottom 1%
99	46.32	

2015/16 MSA Index percentile bands by feed type

Grain Fed		Grass Fed	
Band	Index	Band	Index
1	65.70	1	66.58
5	63.55	5	63.89
10	62.22	10	62.79
25	59.55	25	61.16
50	56.56	50	56.15
75	54.21	75	56.24
90	51.17	90	53.41
95	48.77	95	51.01
99	46.10	99	46.79

How do I use percentile bands?

If your average MSA Index results were equivalent or higher than the figure shown in Band 25, your cattle have eating quality results indicating they are in the top 25% of MSA graded cattle in Australia for that group – nationally, grass or grainfed.

Grainfed cattle are defined as those that meet the AUSMEAT requirements to be classified as grainfed. MSA graded cattle that do not meet this requirement are classified as grass fed for MSA data purposes.

Table 1: The effect of carcass attributes on the MSA Index

Carcass input	Relative importance of these traits in changing the MSA Index
HGP Status	Very High
Milk-fed vealer	Very High
Saleyard	Very High
MSA marbling	High
Hump height (for cattle greater than 0% TBC)	High
Tropical Breed Content (TBC)**	High
Ossification score	High
Rib fat	Medium
Hot standard carcass weight (HSCW)	Low
Sex	Low

Beef Eating Quality Audit Report

In an industry first, the eating quality of Australian beef was audited and benchmarked to help cattle producers optimise the potential of their cattle and compare their performance with other like-minded producers.

The inaugural Australian Beef Eating Quality Audit Report produced by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is based on Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading results using the MSA Index scores of more than three million cattle processed in the 2014-15 financial year.

The report will help to improve understanding of the drivers of MSA compliance and the factors impacting on eating quality performance.

This will not only benefit consumers but will be valuable in potentially increasing farm gate returns for cattle producers.

This is the first time such a benchmarking exercise has been conducted in Australia, and over 57 million pieces of information were collected on carcasses during the MSA grading process. Going forward, eating quality audit reports will occur biennially.

The results confirm that MSA beef producers have the opportunity to make further improvements to their herds to help boost eating quality.

Our objective is to improve the MSA Index by two points by 2020.

Sarah Strachan

The MSA Index is calculated using only attributes influenced by pre-slaughter production, such as on-farm genetic, environmental and management factors. It is a consistent benchmark that can be used across all processors and geographic regions and over time.

The improvement of the MSA Index and subsequent eating quality potential of carcasses is largely under the control of the producer.

The report examines compliance and eating quality performance by various production categories including feed types, the use of Hormonal Growth Promotants (HGP) and gender.

By segregating the information by categories and states, we felt it became more meaningful to producers. They should be able to easily find where their results fit within this report and benchmark their performance.

Several key carcass traits were identified as having high importance in changing the MSA Index, including marbling and ossification. HGP status was also rated as being very high in importance in its ability to change the MSA Index, due to its direct impact on eating quality in addition to its impact on traits such as ossification and marbling.





*Our objective is to improve
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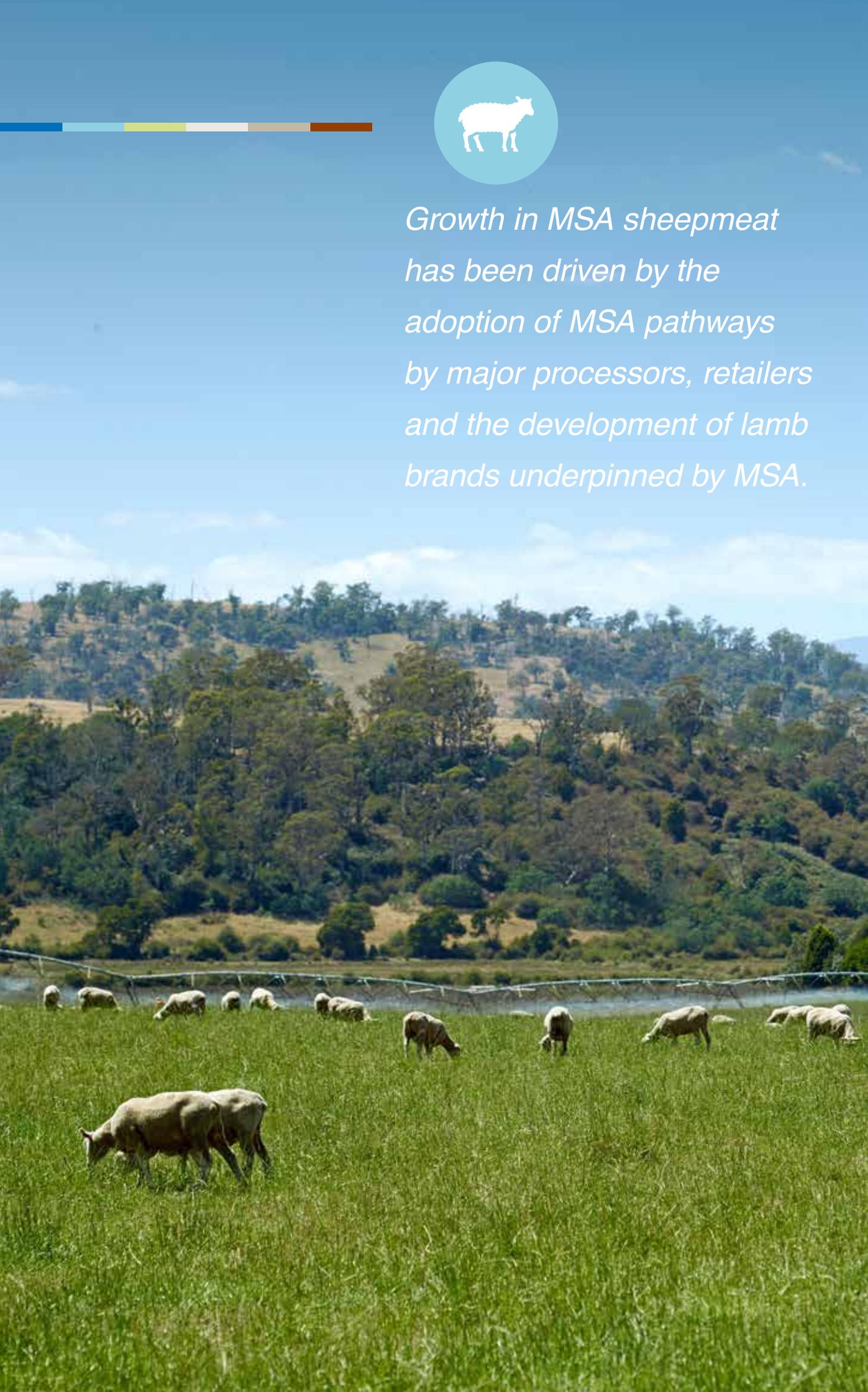
Sarah Strachan



The report can be downloaded from: www.mla.com.au/msa



Growth in MSA sheepmeat has been driven by the adoption of MSA pathways by major processors, retailers and the development of lamb brands underpinned by MSA.

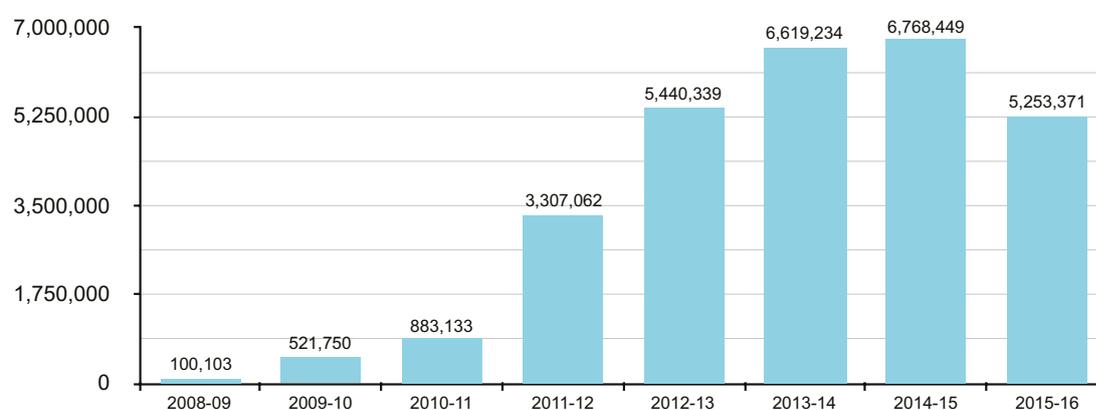


MSA Sheepmeat

The MSA sheepmeat program has held strong this year with more than five million lambs processed through MSA pathways and standards – that's a 500% increase since 2010-11, whilst recognising the slight decline of 22% in 2015-16. The proportion of trademarked lambs however continues to increase.

The growth has been driven by the adoption of MSA pathways by major processors and retailers as well as the development of lamb brands underpinned by MSA.

Chart 5: National MSA sheepmeat numbers



MSA Sheepmeat

Across Australia 19 abattoirs are processing MSA sheep meat with 63% of the lambs presented for MSA in 2015-16, trademarked through the supply chain. This is an increase in MSA trademarked lambs of 12% on the 2014-15 financial year.

The proportion of sheep graded with MSA through both informal and trademarked pathways represented 23% of the national lamb slaughter. Of the 3244 new MSA producer registrations processed in 2015-16, 60% became accredited to supply sheep.

Chart 6: MSA sheepmeat numbers by state 2015/16

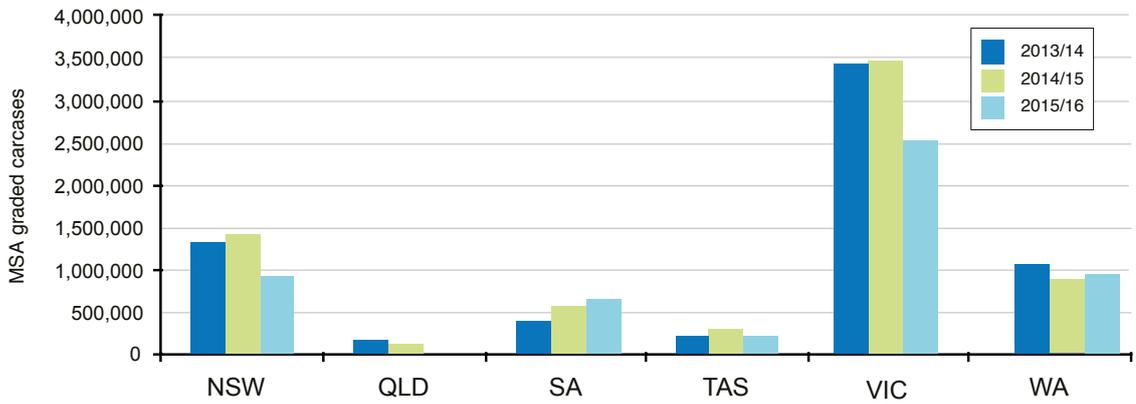
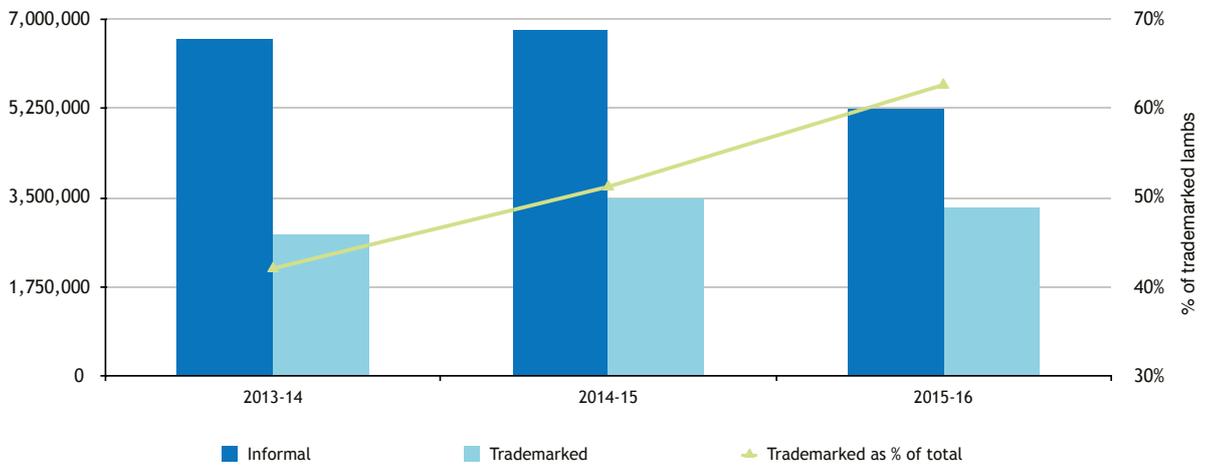


Chart 7: Trademarked as a proportion of all MSA graded lambs





*Of the 3244 new MSA
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Supply chain impact



*More than
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Supply chain impact

Growing by 8%, more than 3000 cattle and/or sheep producers became MSA registered to supply livestock through the MSA program in 2015-16. Of those, 67% took advantage of the online registration process.

More than 2000 producers received MSA education through almost 50 workshops or information sessions involving MSA and 2367 producers completed MSA training online.

Almost 700 end users (wholesalers, retailer and foodservice operators) participated in MSA training, with 58% of this training conducted online.

266 operatives across 25 abattoirs completed MSA training to understand the impact of processing on beef or sheepmeat eating quality.

32 new MSA graders were trained and accredited, and 29 supply chain participants engaged in the week-long MSA Meat Science course.'

E-learning program success

Released in late 2015 the MSA online training courses Excellence in Eating Quality for End Users, and Producing Excellence in Eating Quality for Producers, were developed to enhance the educational resources available for producers and end users and aid in a more efficient registration and licensing process.

Created in partnership with Savv-e digital learning agency, the MSA end-user and producer e-learning programs won a coveted Silver Brandon Hall Group Excellence award for the Best Advance in Creating an Extended Enterprise Learning Program in Florida.



Now entering its 22nd year, the Brandon Hall Group Excellence Awards Program (BHGEAP) is the most prestigious awards program in the industry. BHGEAP rewards organisations that have successfully deployed programs, strategies, modalities, processes, systems, and tools that have achieved measurable results.

MSA operations manager Sarah Strachan said since the programs went live in October 2015 more than 1500 producers had used the online resources.

"We are greatly encouraged by the awards we have received, recognising our efforts towards creating user-friendly online learning and registration programs for our stakeholders," she said.

The award comes just six months after MSA and Savv-e won a Gold LearnX Impact Award for the Producing Excellence in Eating Quality program.

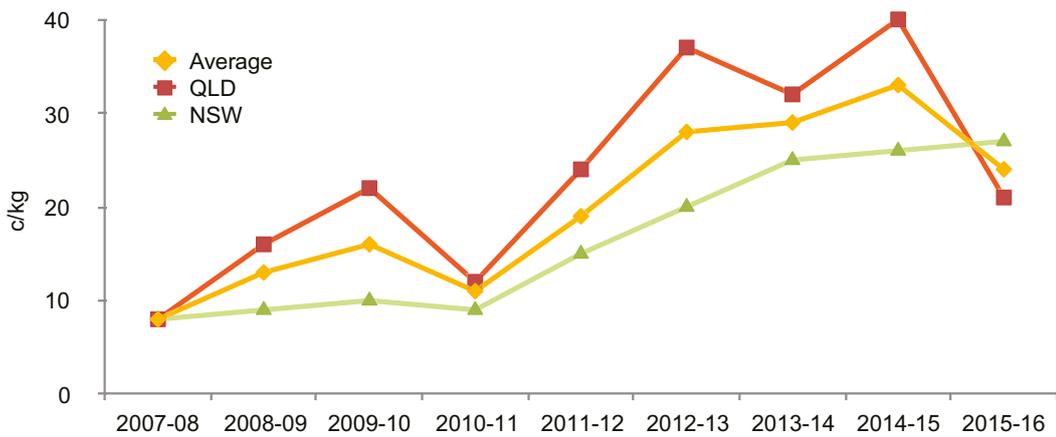
Cattle premiums

Over the hooks cattle prices for MSA cattle, as reported by the National Livestock Reporting Service, were higher on average than non-MSA cattle in both Queensland and New South Wales. The average price differential for MSA young non-feedlot cattle across all weight ranges was \$0.24/kg.

Based on the average carcass weight of MSA cattle in 2015-16, MSA beef producers potentially received an additional \$66 per head for young non-feedlot cattle and \$45 per head for cattle that meet the grainfed specifications, totalling an estimated \$153 million delivered back to the farm gate.

MSA young cattle in NSW had the greatest average differential of \$0.27/kg, while QLD recorded \$0.21/kg.

Chart 8: Price differentials for MSA young cattle

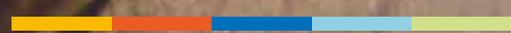


Source: NLRS





Over the hooks cattle prices for MSA cattle were higher on average than non-MSA cattle by \$0.24/kg resulting in an estimated \$153 million returned to the farm-gate.





Brands

Beyond the farm-gate, the MSA program can be used as a quality marker to underpin Australian beef and lamb brands. In 2015-16 nine brands became licensed to use the MSA trademark to support their brand and adopt MSA grading to ensure consistent quality of their products. And eight brands have adopted exporter guidelines to communicate MSA in international markets. There are now 140 MSA licensed brands in Australia.



End users

As of June 30, 2016, there was a 12% increase in the number of end user outlets licensed to promote MSA products. There is currently 345 MSA licensed wholesale businesses supplying over 3300 outlets Australia-wide with MSA beef and sheepmeat. These outlets include independent butchers, supermarkets and food service operators.



Retail

1100 independent butcher surveys were conducted during the last financial year by Millward Brown. Of those surveyed 63% sold MSA beef. Of those butchers, 67% rated their satisfaction with MSA beef as good to excellent. While price information about lamb was not collected, 58% of butchers surveyed were aware of MSA lamb.

The average price differential for MSA beef compared to non-MSA cuts at independent butcher stores across all major primal cuts was \$1.73/kg – an increase of 66% on 2014-15.

Consistent with previous years, MSA tenderloins averaged the highest price differential at \$4.33/kg, followed by cube roll at \$2.83/kg.



End user training facilitator, Kelly Payne demonstrating eating quality opportunities with secondary cuts at the MSA Producer Awards.

Chart 9: MSA average differentials 2015-16 by cut

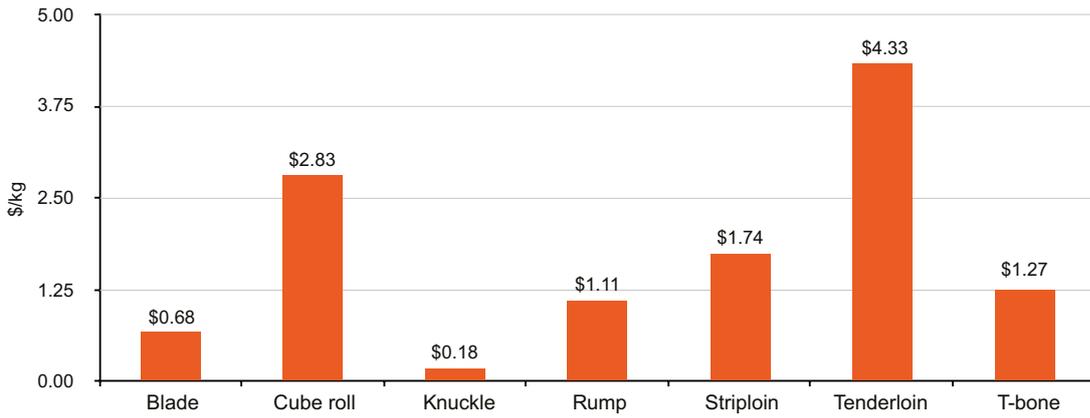
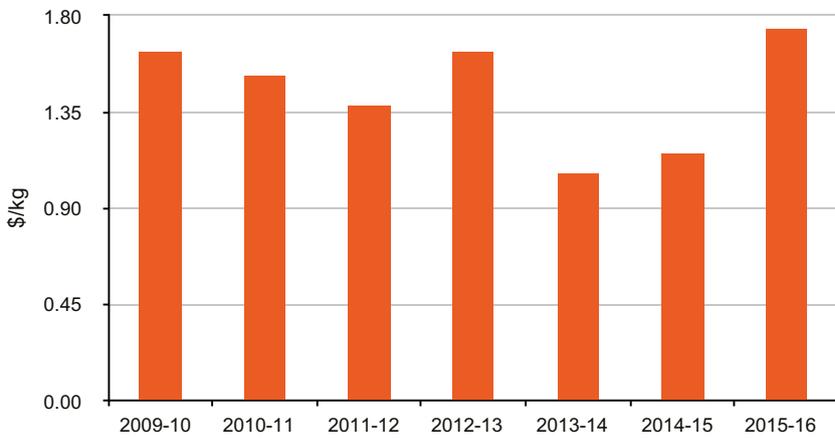


Chart 10: Average MSA retail price differentials





MSA Consumer Awareness

Consumer recognition of the MSA logo has remained stable between 40% and 50% since 2012.

Using the Millward Brown consumer tracker, an ongoing survey of Australian consumers aged between 18 and 64, the survey also revealed that passionate foodies were more likely to know about MSA than other consumer groups.



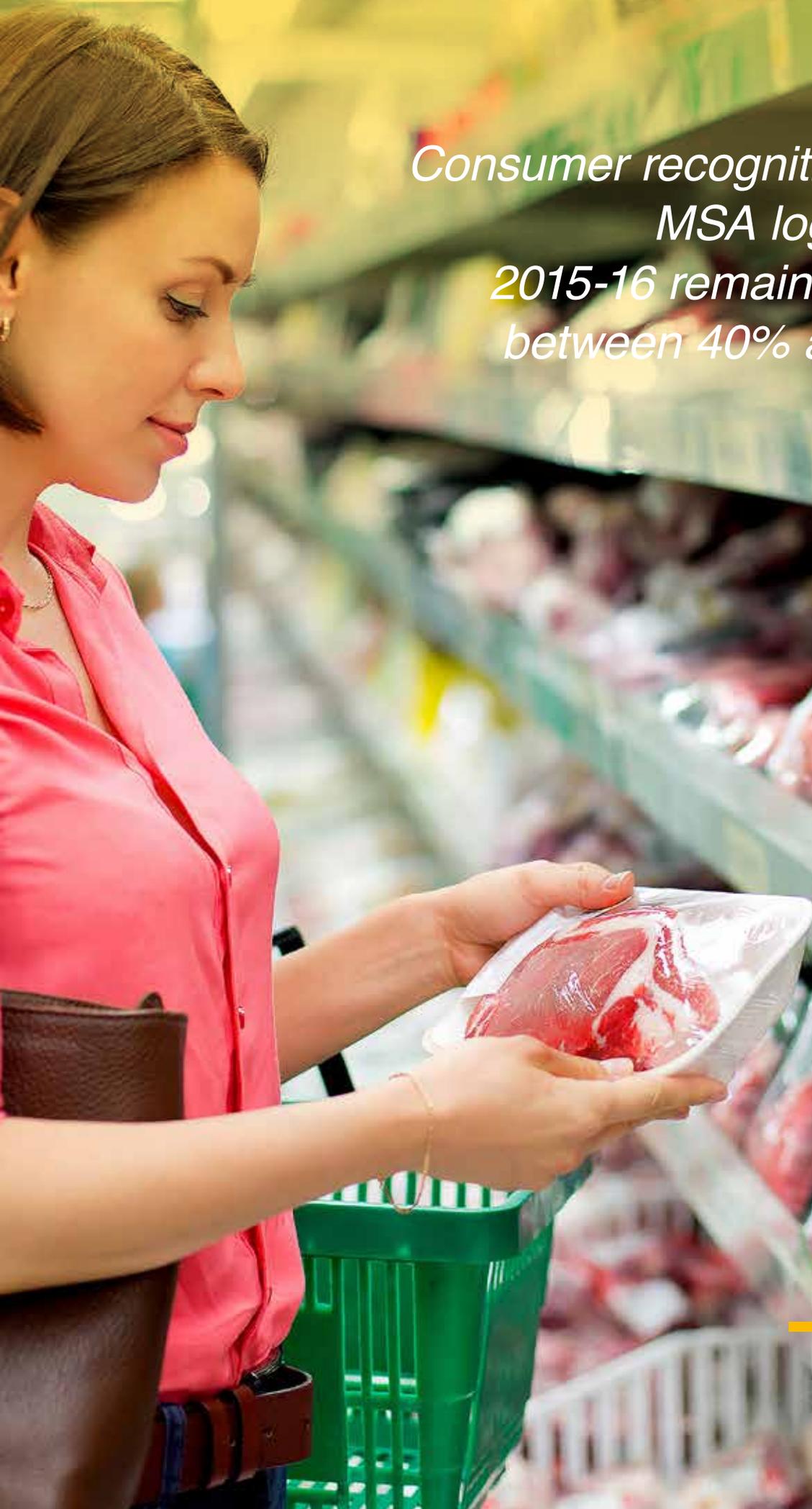
The supermarket environment is where the vast majority, 59%, of consumers encounter MSA, followed closely by butchers (23%).

MSA recognition was greatest amongst the consumer attitudinal segment defined as Passionate Foodies. These consumers love food, cooking and experimenting with new options.





Consumer recognition of the MSA logo during 2015-16 remained stable between 40% and 50%.





*1728 trays of
meat, displayed
in different
packaging types*



Research & Development

During 2015-16, in a major study of beef, the interaction between beef meat colour and pH as well as impact of packaging styles, co-funded by Meat and Livestock Australia, Australian Meat Processor Corporation and Teys Australia, was conducted utilising MSA consumer sensory protocols and direct consumer visual appraisal.

This project involved 1728 trays of meat, displayed in different packaging types being visually assessed by 1680 consumers. The consumer sensory evaluation involved 1440 consumers resulting in over 24,000 observations.

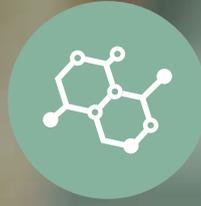
The project also trialed use of objective technologies for meat colour. Outcomes from this trial will be released during 2016-17.

During the latter part of the year, preparation work began for the MSA mixing and stress trial. This trial will evaluate the effect of various pathways to slaughter and whether a period are effective. Additionally, technologies to detect on-farm stress were trialed in this project.



Consumers were asked if meat colour affected their beef purchasing decisions.

Program Integrity



*More than
1000 audits
were
conducted.*



Program Integrity

During 2015-16 more than 1000 audits were conducted on MSA licensees from saleyards and processors through to retail, wholesale, supermarkets and foodservice outlets. A risk-based approach has been implemented for end user auditing.

9.92% of end user outlets audited received corrective actions (CARs), which is a 2.43% reduction from 2014-15. The main reason for non-conformance was related to staff training.

This improvement in end user compliance reflects an uptake of resources provided by MSA over the past 12 months including the online self-assessment tool, and upgraded online end user training.

All MSA licensees are supported by MLA staff through account management processes to aid with compliance to standards, resolve corrective actions as well as identify further opportunities to gain value from the MSA program.

MSA maintained both ISO accreditation and USDA Process Verified Program approvals this year.



Table 2: Audits conducted in 2015-16

Audits	
Processor	102
Saleyard	46
End user audits	
Wholesaler	233
Supermarket	141
Retailer	371
Food service	132
End user CARs issued	
Critical	4
Major	137
Processor CARs issued	
Major	5
Saleyard CARs issued	
Major	5



From March through to April 2016, one Producer of the Year was crowned from each state.



MSA Beef Producer Awards

Celebrating hard work, dedication and quality produce, Meat Standards Australia recognised six of the nation's top beef producers for the inaugural MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards.

The Awards recognised those producers who achieved outstanding compliance rates, as well as high eating quality performance.

From March through to April 2016, one Producer of the Year was crowned in each state at an awards event held in conjunction with a Future of Eating Quality forum. Over 600 producers attended the forums with feedback from attendees rating the day as nine out of 10 for meeting their expectations.

The forums shared insights into the future developments for MSA. Topics included:

→ **MLA's 2016 beef cattle industry projections**

→ **What does the next five years look like for MSA?**

→ **Benchmarking eating quality in Australia**

→ **Research programs assisting MSA producers**

→ **Transformational technologies in the Australian beef industry**

→ **Using consumer insights to market Australian beef**



MLA managing director Richard Norton and awards guest speaker Merv Hughes.

To be eligible for the MSA Producer Awards, a producer's annual MSA-graded volume had to be above the average for their state.

Each eligible producer received a score out of 100, weighted on two factors:

- The compliance to MSA minimum requirements
- Eating quality performance as determined by the MSA Index

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) General Manager, Livestock Productivity Dr Jane Weatherley said the awards were a fantastic opportunity to acknowledge those producers that had exhibited excellence within the MSA program.

"Our producers work tirelessly to produce a quality product that meets the strict MSA criteria," Dr Weatherley said.

"It is this hard work and dedication that has made MSA products globally recognised as a quality product, where we aim to consistently meet consumers' expectations for tenderness, juiciness and flavour."

Kahlers' care at feeding and handling pays MSA dividends

Queensland cattle producers Graham and Kay Kahler have come close to producing the perfect Meat Standards Australia (MSA) graded steak through their careful breeding and feeding of their predominantly Limousin yearling steers and heifers.

Turning off around 100 yearling steers and heifers each year from their property near Geham in South East Queensland, the Kahlers were recognised at a ceremony in Toowoomba as the State's best MSA producers.

Mr Kahler said the secret to turning off cattle to meet MSA requirements is in the feed and also the breed.

"Our calves are reared on good kikuyu country at Yarraman and when they are weaned they come onto oats cultivation here at Geham," Mr Kahler said.

"They are then moved into smaller lots and fed on a hay and grain mix. They are fed until 10 months of age before being sold into the market that best suits the cattle."

Mr Kahler said genetics also played a key role.

"You've got to have the right breed for producing quality MSA-graded beef and that is what we are trying to do," he said.



Graham and Kay Kahler

"We are targeting the domestic market through processors close to us because our cattle are young, and I like the idea of keeping them in Australia and producing food for Australians.

"I reckon that if we've got a good article and the consumers love it, then it makes us feel better and you know you are doing the right thing."

Mr Kahler said that MSA was good for the bottom line, adding "a few more cents per kilo", and it gives him a goal to work towards of producing a product that the consumer likes.

"To be named the state's best MSA producer is something I would never have dreamt of, but it is lovely to have that honour," he said.

"A lot of hard work goes into getting our cattle to meet the MSA requirements and perform well but it's good when you get a stamp at the end of the day to say it has been done right."

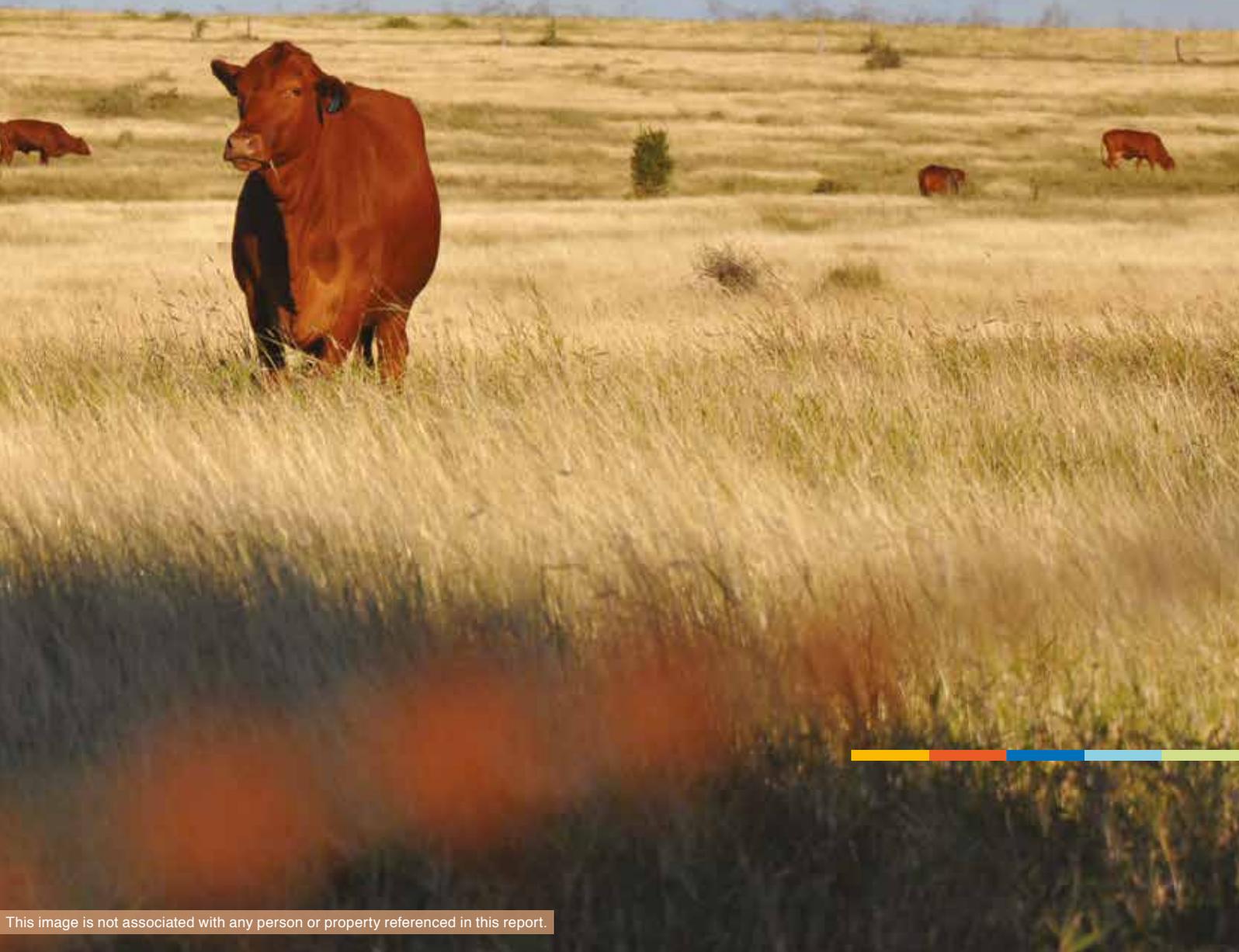
The competition assessment showed the Kahler's MSA Index sitting well above the national average.

Their cattle's ossification or maturity scores were low and exhibited desirable amounts of marbling which enhances the juiciness and flavour of the beef.



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Graham Kahler



Whole of life strategy pays MSA premium

Achieving the best scores under the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) system requires a “whole of life approach”, according to Rangers Valley Managing Director Don Mackay.

And he should know – the strategy has earned the northern New South Wales lot feeder the title of MSA Producer of the Year for the State.

“It starts right back with the genetics, then how the animals are weaned and backgrounded, and the low stress environment throughout the whole process,” Mr Mackay said.

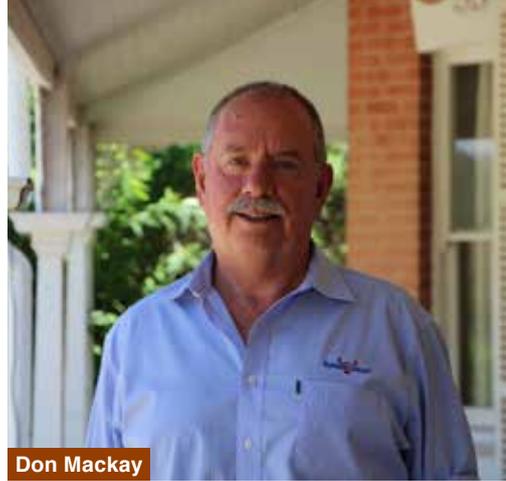
“Then it’s all about how they are managed in the feed yard, how they are transported, and if you miss any of those components then you put at risk your capacity to achieve the best results under MSA, and therefore a really high quality product.”

With 33,500 head of Angus and Wagyu cross cattle on feed, Rangers Valley processes and markets beef around the world, selling more than \$130 million worth of meat annually to around 20 countries.

They also produce around 12,000 animals per year for the ‘Coles Finest’ program.

The Angus cattle are mostly sourced in NSW and Victoria but can come from as far afield as King Island and South Australia.

Around 2000 Wagyu animals are bred on the 4000-hectare station, 30 kilometres north of Glen Innes.



Don Mackay

Low stress handling is a critical part of the process for all cattle that come through Rangers Valley.

“All cattle that are brought in spend three weeks backgrounding on the property and that’s very important in terms of their health and their stress levels entering a grainfed environment,” Mr Mackay said.

“We have very specific training programs for all our staff so they understand the importance of low stress handling. We make sure when the cattle go into the grain feeding environment they are properly assimilated so they are very comfortable.”

The MSA data revealed little variation in the scores for the Rangers Valley cattle, reflecting the consistency of the product being turned off.

From a consumer perspective, the beef presents a great and reliable eating experience due to its tenderness and flavour and for Mr Mackay, the satisfaction of the consumer is really what it’s all about.

“To be named as the best MSA producer is recognition of the systems that we have put in place, of the dedication that our business has to high quality and to delivering an animal throughout its life that can provide that meat quality that is then assessed under the MSA system,” he said.

“It’s all about the consumer, and that when a consumer walks out of the restaurant their expectations have been matched by the experience.”



We make sure when the cattle go into the grain feeding environment they are properly assimilated so they are very comfortable.

Don Mackay

Nutrition key to MSA dividends at Benalla

For Benalla cattle producer Gary Coventry the secret to producing high quality Meat Standards Australia (MSA) beef is in capitalising on available feed.

He ensures there is feed available before buying in cattle, and reduces the number of cattle grazing during the drier months when feed supply is limited.

All his cattle are pasture fed on a combination of clover, rye and phalaris, all of which is supplemented with hay when required.

“For me the secret to a getting a high MSA Index score and good compliance is to finish your cattle off when your feed is there and don't have too many cattle on when there's no feed – it's as simple as that,” Mr Coventry said.

Mr Coventry was recently named Victoria's top MSA producer by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA).

“To be named the MSA producer for the state is a real feather in my cap, and also my agent's cap,” he said.

“I like to think that I'm doing a good job with my cattle and producing good quality beef that people are going to enjoy.”

The MSA assessment revealed Mr Coventry's beef was of extremely high quality due to low ossification or maturity scores – a measure which has a significant impact on tenderness – as well



Gary Coventry (centre)

as a desirable amount of marbling, corresponding to excellent flavour, and high levels of juiciness.

The high marbling scores reflect Mr Coventry's focus on high-quality nutrition. Mr Coventry farms 'Ballentubba', a 240 hectare pasture block, as well as another 160ha farm 'Flowing Vale' at nearby Lima East, which is owned by his extended family and was selected by his great grandfather in 1876.

One block is used to grow out steers and the other for finishing. The steers are usually bought at close to 300kg in February or March from saleyards within a 200km radius – Wangaratta, Wodonga, Yea, Euroa, Echuca or Shepparton – with the aim of turning them off in October-November.

The steers are generally Angus, Hereford or pure beef breeds but Mr Coventry doesn't mind a European-cross animal, as long as the cattle have a good temperament.

His farms lie in a 750mm rainfall belt and turn off 250-300 steers annually to produce a 250kg carcass for the domestic market, or a heavier carcass of up to 400kg for export, depending on how the season unfolds.

Mr Coventry said that alongside the consistent supply of nutrition his land can produce, the other factor influencing his exceptional MSA scores was keeping the stress levels of his cattle low.



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He achieves this by avoiding the use of dogs, frequently rotating his cattle in paddocks, and only yarding when necessary.

“Some people run their cattle through the yards every two weeks and weigh them... why do that? You’re only making more work for yourself,” he said.

“I only yard them when I really have to, and by rotating them around the paddocks, it keeps them quiet and they get used to you moving around amongst them all the time.”

While Mr Coventry believes he’s just a “small cog” in the larger wheel of the beef industry, he is proud to be “doing his bit” to ensure that consumers are eating quality beef.

“And MSA accreditation does make a difference to the bottom line because it’s all dollars and cents in the long run,” he said.

I like to think that I’m doing a good job with my cattle and producing good quality beef that people are going to enjoy.

Gary Coventry

King of Kindred

For Tasmanian cattle producers Philip and Gaylene Hughes, the secret to producing high quality Meat Standards Australia (MSA) beef is in keeping their cattle calm and quiet.

By minimising stock stress, not overstocking their Kindred property, and always having plenty of silage available through the drier months, the couple has found a formula that has delivered them the title of Tasmania's MSA Producer of the Year.

"Don't stress your cattle, give them plenty of tucker and don't overstock," Mr Hughes said.

"Genetics also play a big part in MSA, because you've got to have the temperament right, and you've got to have the breeding and the muscles.

"I want cattle that look like they'll grow out to 600 or 650 kilograms, with plenty of muscle about them."

The Hughes' 65-hectare property sits on the undulating agricultural landscape of Kindred, near the northern coastal town of Devonport.

An annual rainfall of 900 to 1200mm permits their cattle to run on pastures all year round, with a diet consisting of permanent pastures, clover and occasionally silage.



Philip Hughes

However, in tougher climatic conditions, silage can become a main dietary constituent for their cattle.

Mr Hughes said it was important to keep the cattle well fed through hard times, with a constant plane of nutrition a key factor in producing tender beef.

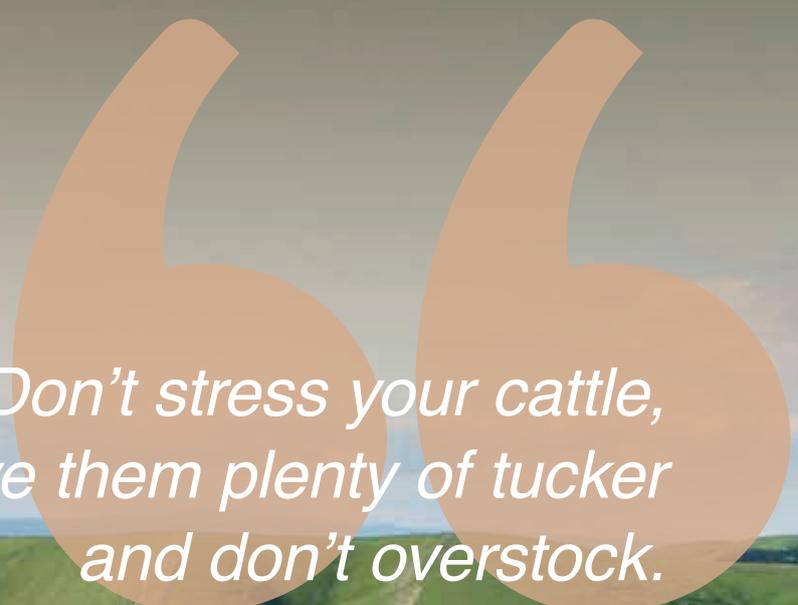
This focus on nutrition played an important role in the Hughes delivering such a high-quality end product.

Their cattle recorded low ossification scores – a measure which has a significant impact on tenderness – and desirable marbling scores, corresponding to better juiciness, and flavour.

The quiet handling of the stock also contributed to ensuring the cattle met the MSA minimum requirements of having desirable meat colour, meat pH and fat coverage.

"To be named the best MSA producer is great. There's a bit of prestige with it and I feel like the king of Kindred," Mr Hughes said.

"It's just great to be part of the beef industry... it makes me feel good to be selling good cattle."



*Don't stress your cattle,
give them plenty of tucker
and don't overstock.*

Philip Hughes

No stress is key for WA's best MSA beef producer

Western Australian cattle producer Gerald Young believes the secret to producing high quality MSA beef is to ensure minimal stress while handling the animals in the yards.

Gerald and his wife Denice run 70 Angus-Friesian cows on their Bridgetown property, with the cows joined to Simmental bulls to turn off about 60 MSA-graded vealers each year.

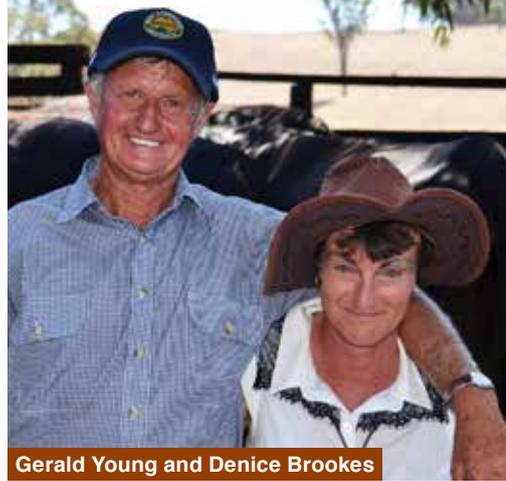
The low-stress environment they have created, combined with a focus on good nutrition and genetics, has resulted in such high quality beef that they were recently awarded the inaugural title of Western Australia's MSA Producer of the Year.

"For better handling of my cattle, my yard is designed so that I can draft the cattle by myself," Mr Young said.

"I don't open my mouth one little bit – sometimes I feel like it, but I don't – and that's why they are not stressed out, because I'm not shouting at them.

"I stick to my Simmental bulls because I find they're good to handle and the calves have got plenty of muscle, and they produce the ideal calf for the market I am targeting.

Mr Young grows oats for hay on his 150-hectare property, which receives an average of 650 millimetres rainfall each year.



Gerald Young and Denice Brookes

Regular feeding and even stocking rates regardless of the season are also influences of his high MSA scoring cattle. "I feed the stock hay early in the morning every second day without fail, and I make sure I've always got plenty of hay on the property," Mr Young said.

"History has shown if I try and run more cattle to make more money I end up out of pocket. I find if I just run an even herd of cattle, I'm prepared for when a bad year hits and I still come out in front."

Mr Young's cattle stood out due to their low ossification scores, which indicate that his milk fed vealers have an easy path to slaughter.

Mr Young also recorded zero dark cutters, which is a testament to the low-stress handling the animals receive. The honour of being named as the WA champion has made Mr Young's 2016 a year to remember. But selflessly, he hopes other Bridgetown and WA producers can learn from the secrets of his success.

"I'll continue doing what I'm doing and I hope other farmers can cheat off me, because that's the only way you can learn is to cheat off someone who is doing well," Mr Young said.

"It's a great honour for me to have this reward. If only Dad could come back and see what I've done – he'd say I always knew you could do it. Even to be named as a finalist is a great honour – thank you very much."



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*I hope other farmers can
cheat off me, because that's
the only way you can learn
is to cheat off someone who
is doing well.*

Gerald Young

McLachlan genetics key to MSA Award

Quality genetic make-up is the prime ingredient to producing high quality MSA beef, according to Mt Pleasant beef producer Angus McLachlan.

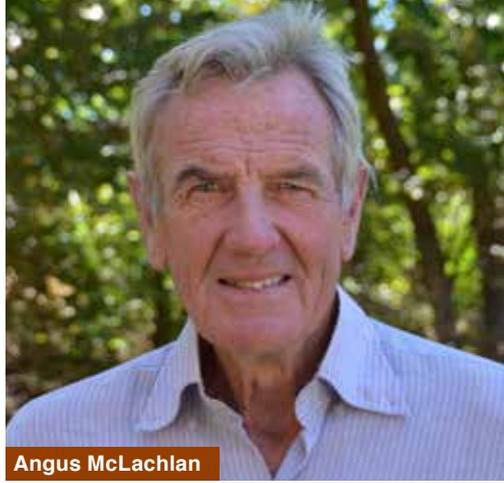
The focus on genetics, combined with a low-stress environment, has landed in Mr McLachlan the title of South Australia's best MSA producer.

"For us the key to the MSA opportunity is the genetic background of the cows combined with a Limousin bull over them to give our cattle the weight that suits the domestic trade," Mr McLachlan said.

"We have Friesian in the background of our cattle which gives us a bit of marbling and clearly milk for the calves.

"We get the beef from the other half of the female with the fat that comes with an Angus. And then the Limo bull, although not particularly suited to marbling, gives us the bulk and the muscle that we are looking for."

Mr McLachlan's magnificent 2000-hectare property 'Rosebank', which incidentally featured as one of the farms in Channel Nine's hit soapie McLeod's Daughters, is nestled in the Adelaide Hills only 50 kilometres east of Adelaide.



Angus McLachlan

Every year for the past 20 years, Mr McLachlan has turned off between 100 and 115 stress-free grass-fed vealers of mixed sex to Woolworths, aiming for a dressed weight of 225 kilograms.

"I buy my heifers from Camperdown in Victoria on the point of calving as two-year-olds. Those heifers have been hand raised and bucket reared as poddy calves, and as a consequence they're very quiet," Mr McLachlan said.

"My overseer, Paul Shutz, is very gentle with cattle. No one shouts at them and they rarely need anything more than reasonable encouragement.

"As a result, the calves are very easy to handle, and when we separate them to weigh them, they don't seem to get too upset about that."

This low-stress environment has resulted in excellent compliance rates to the MSA specifications by avoiding dark-cutting meat and the consistent growth path to slaughter has resulted in low ossification scores assessed during grading – a measure directly linked to tenderness.



*For us the key to MSA
opportunity is the
genetic background
of the cows...*

Angus McLachlan



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Published September 2016

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