



# TIPS & TOOLS

MEAT STANDARDS  
AUSTRALIA

## How MSA beef is graded

### Licensing a processor

Plants or processors that process cattle for MSA must be licensed. Prior to obtaining an MSA licence, all processing critical control points of the processor are assessed as each can impact on the eating quality of the final product. This includes:

- Livestock receival areas to ensure cattle will not be stressed or injured.
- The slaughter floor and chillers to determine the requirements for meeting the pH-temperature window (see *MSA Tips & Tools: The effect of the pH temperature decline on beef eating quality*).
- Conduct trial carcase grading to determine likely eating quality outcomes.
- The boning room to determine packing and labelling capabilities.

A list of MSA licensed processors can be found at [mla.com.au/msa](http://mla.com.au/msa).

### Sending cattle to the processor

For cattle to be MSA Graded they must be consigned to an MSA licensed processing facility. A Livestock Production Assurance National Vendor Declaration (LPA NVD) and a MSA vendor declaration must be sent with the cattle; these documents will be checked by the MSA accredited grader and livestock personnel (see *MSA Tips & Tools: how to supply beef in the MSA system*).

### Procedures prior to grading

Information from the MSA vendor declaration, such as HGP use and Tropical Breed Content (TBC) (yes or no) is recorded against each lot with assigned carcase/body numbers obtained from the slaughter floor production sheet.

Carcases are split down the spine on the slaughter floor and the sides are placed together in the chiller overnight. Grading is generally carried out the next morning prior to commencement of the boning process.

The beef sides are cut at the loin prior to grading to expose the rib eye and a minimum of 20 minutes is required for the meat to bloom to its optimum colour. The loin must be less than 12 degrees Celsius.

### Key points

- Determining the eating quality of MSA beef requires standards to be maintained from paddock to plate.
- Cattle that meet the MSA requirements are graded at MSA licensed abattoirs.
- Each carcase is graded by an MSA accredited grader with an eating quality score assigned to each individual cut.
- Cuts with the same eating quality are packed together with the MSA grade, recommended cooking method(s) and ageing requirements specified on the carton label.

The MSA model, which calculates the grading outcome for each carcase, is held on a data capture unit (DCU). This is a small handheld computer that the MSA accredited grader uses to record the information from each individual carcase during grading.

### How carcases are graded

Each carcase side is identified with a ticket and the following information is recorded in the DCU, this can be captured from either carcase side:

- Carcase number and lot number – cattle from individual vendors will be kept in separate lots.
- Hot Standard Carcase Weight – important in determining weight for maturity.
- Sex – male or female.
- The hump height, in conjunction with HSCW and sex, is measured to the nearest 5mm to determine the eating quality grade outcome. The hump height is measured to determine the eating quality grade outcome.
- Hanging method – determined as being either Achilles hung or tenderstretch.
- Ossification – measured to determine carcase maturity.
- Marbling – using both the MSA and AUS-MEAT measurement systems.
- Rib fat – a minimum of 3mm is required, measured at the AUS-MEAT standard site, to ensure that the carcase

has adequate fat cover to protect the carcase during the chilling process. Overall fat cover is also assessed including any hide puller damage. A primal that has an area greater than 10cm x 10cm affected by hidepuller damage will be ineligible for MSA.

- pH and temperature – pH is measured using a pH meter and must be below 5.71. Temperature should be below 12°C according to the AUS-MEAT standards.

Information on each of these factors and their impact on beef eating quality is available in other MSA Tips & Tools.

Other measurements that do not impact on eating quality may be collected for feedback purposes. Brandowners may implement company specifications for some of these attributes based on their customer or market requirements:

- Eye muscle area (EMA) – measured in square cm using an AUS-MEAT grid.
- Fat colour – recorded using AUS-MEAT chips from 0 (white) to 9 (yellow).
- Meat colour – recorded using AUS-MEAT standard meat colour chips in a range of 1A (very pale) to 7 (very dark purple).

If the carcase does not meet all the MSA minimum requirements it is given a reason for non-compliance code that indicates which of the specifications were not met.

Reasons for non-compliance	
a	Subcutaneous fat depth inadequate
b	Fat distribution inadequate
c	pH above 5.70
e	Miscellaneous (can include bad bruising)
f	Outside chiller assessment parameters
g	Fails to meet hide puller damage specifications

Note: The code 'd' was previously used to identify carcases that failed a now defunct MSA meat colour requirement.

## Product identification and boning

To simplify the logistics of the MSA system to produce cartons of beef at the processor, while maintaining eating quality, carcases are classified into groups of 'like' eating qualities. The groups may be aligned with the brands packed by the processor.

The eating quality groups used within the processor are based on the requirements of their markets and customers and can be based upon the:

- eligible cuts
- recommended cooking methods
- eating quality scores
- ageing requirements.

All MSA products are identified on or within the primal packaging. Carton labels on each box of MSA product identify the MSA eating quality level, ageing periods and cooking methods for those cuts.

Carcases sent to butchers are broken down and sold according to MSA cut by cook method tables.

## How grading feedback reports are generated

All information from the data capture unit is uploaded directly to the myMSA online program. Detailed grading reports and summaries can be accessed by producers at [mymsa.com.au](http://mymsa.com.au).

Registered producers are encouraged to attend MSA workshops to increase understanding of the factors that affect eating quality and best management practices.

## Integrity of the MSA standards

MSA licensed facilities such as processing plants and independent boning rooms are periodically audited by an independent third party to ensure the MSA standards are maintained. MSA trained operatives assist on the slaughter floor to ensure the pH temperature window requirements are met.

Accredited MSA graders are regularly correlated against set standards to ensure consistency between all processors and graders.

### Further information

Visit [mla.com.au/msa](http://mla.com.au/msa) or contact MSA 1800 111 672



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