



## Beef Eating Quality Audit Results

The MLA have recently released the findings of the 2015 Australian beef eating quality audit. The objective of the research was to establish the baseline for beef eating quality, based on Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading.

The report aims to identify the key drivers of beef eating quality, using the MSA Index as the measure of eating quality. Ultimately such information should enhance the ability of Australian cattle producers to optimise the eating quality potential of their cattle through management and on-farm interventions.

### Meat Standards Australia

The MSA program was implemented commercially in 1999. It was developed by the Australian red meat industry to improve the eating quality consistency of beef. The grading system was developed using extensive international market research.

It takes into account all factors that affect the eating quality of the 169 cuts and cooking combinations within a beef carcass. The system is a global leader in its ability to predict the eating quality of cuts within a carcass, for the consumer.

Information has been collated for over 3.2 million cattle processed under the MSA system during the 2014-15 financial year. It is the first time such a benchmarking study has been undertaken in Australia, and has been made possible through the introduction of the MSA Index in 2014. The MSA Index is independent of processing, rather it reflects management, environmental and genetic differences between cattle at the point of slaughter. The MSA index ranges from 30 to 80.

The audit report utilised the MSA Index scores for 3,005,544 carcasses that were compliant to the MSA minimum requirements. The report is presented from a national and state based perspective, and includes information on compliance and eating quality of the production categories of feed type, Hormone Growth Promotants (HGP) and gender.

The average MSA Index for 2014-15 was 57.61, with a range from 33 to 73.5 for compliant carcasses. The average index for grass-fed cattle was 58.31, while for grain-fed cattle it was 56.83.

Of the MSA graded cattle; 55% were grass-fed, 76% of whom were hormone growth promotant (HGP) free. The remaining 45% were grain-fed, 46% of which were HGP free. 10.7% of the grass-fed carcasses did not meet the MSA requirements compared to 2.3% of the grain-fed carcasses.

There were no observed seasonal spikes of non-compliance with grain-fed animals, while for the grass-fed stock non-compliance seems to spike during autumn and winter. This is most likely due to seasonal influences on feed quantity and quality. In both groups the non-compliance was due primarily to high pH and dark meat colour.

Grain-fed cattle were on average 17kg heavier than grass-fed cattle. Both groups however had similar ossification scores which indicates quicker weight gain for maturity. Increasing carcass weight and minimising maturity or ossification development is a key factor in optimising eating quality performance.

The report shows that there are areas where producers can make management changes which will help to enhance the eating quality and hence the MSA index for their herds. Participation in the MSA program and adoption of herd improvement practices have been shown to improve returns to producers. In 2014-15 "young cattle which met MSA and company requirements received an additional 33 cents per kilogram over-the-hooks (OTH) compared to non-MSA counterparts."

Producers can find their own average MSA Index results using the myMSA feedback system at [www.mymasa.com.au](http://www.mymasa.com.au)

To download a copy of the Australian Beef Eating Quality Audit Report, visit: <http://www.mla.com.au/Marketing-beef-and-lamb/Meat-Standards-Australia>

To watch a video explanation of the report at a recent series of eating quality forums, visit [www.mla.com.au/msaeqforum](http://www.mla.com.au/msaeqforum)

### References:

<http://www.mla.com.au/Marketing-beef-and-lamb/Meat-Standards-Australia>

<https://producer.msagrading.com.au/>

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