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PRESLAUGHTER AND SLAUGHTER FACTORS AFFECTING
MEAT QUALITY IN LAMBS

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ABSTRACT

A plug sampling technique based on a modified muscle biopsy instrument, was developed for the measurement of muscle pH without mutilation of the carcass. It was found possible to routinely obtain muscle tissue samples weighing approximately 2 g and when these were incubated for 24 hours under liquid paraffin at room temperature, followed by homogenisation in a 'Colworth Stomacher', the pH of the solution was found to be an accurate measurement of the ultimate pH of the muscle.

Both the sample method and a direct probe method were found to be well suited for measuring the ultimate pH of muscles. However, the sample method had a higher degree of precision as compared to the probe method when used for measuring pre-rigor pH values.

In a longitudinal survey, in which 1536 lamb carcasses were examined, 85.2% of carcasses were found to have ultimate pH values below 5.80. Highly significant associations were found between season (summer period) and breed (Perendales) and unsatisfactorily high values of ultimate pH. There was also a highly significant direct correlation between the duration of holding periods of lambs and the ultimate pH of meat, whereas there was a highly significant inverse correlation between wool score and ultimate pH. It was concluded that nutrition plays an important role in the development of high ultimate pH values.

Studies at the meat works indicated that there is a highly significant linear relationship between the number of times lambs are washed prior to slaughter and the ultimate pH of the longissimus muscle. Subsequent resting of animals for varying periods prior to slaughter has no apparent effect on repletion of glycogen stores and may, in some cases, exacerbate

the problem of high pH meat. It was also found that washing of lambs is associated with a highly significant increase in bruising of carcasses and that such washing may not necessarily result in a decrease in carcass contamination.

Investigations of the changes of body weights and the weights and nature of ruminoreticular contents during the preslaughter holding period indicated that the ideal time to slaughter lambs, in terms of potential carcass contamination, is 18 to 24 hours after removal from pasture.

It was found that stunning by a 'head-to-leg' electrical method significantly increased the rate of pH decline compared to other methods of slaughter. A further increase in the rate of pH decline was achieved by low voltage stimulation at the time of slaughter. It was concluded that the combined effects of low voltage and high voltage stimulation can cause irreversible contraction and associated toughness in a large proportion of carcasses.

Studies of the occurrence of haemorrhages in carcasses and organs indicated that these defects are related to the method of stunning. Although blood splash has been reported to be associated with prolonged one stage prothrombin times in lambs, no statistical association was found between this parameter and speckling.

It was found that there is a two to threefold increase in arterial pressure following 'head-only' stunning whereas there was only a moderate increase in venous pressure. On the other hand, stunning by the 'head-to-back' method was followed by a decrease in arterial pressure, but venous pressure increased to levels above 50 mm Hg. Electromyographic studies indicated that there is a significant increase in the intensity of muscular activity following 'head-to-back' stunning as compared to 'head-only' stunning and that there is a correlation between the increased muscular activity and the increase in venous pressure. It is concluded that these events may lead to pressure changes in the microcirculatory bed which are likely to be associated with the occurrence of haemorrhagic defects following stunning by electrical methods.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page Number</u>
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
List of Plates	ix
Chapter One : Introduction and general review of literature.	1
Chapter Two : Determination of an appropriate method for measuring the pH of meat.	21
Chapter Three : Cross-sectional studies of ultimate pH in lambs.	59
Chapter Four : The effect of washing and subsequent resting on meat quality.	92
Chapter Five : The effect of fasting on carcass weights and nature and weights of ruminoreticular contents.	115
Chapter Six : The effect of different methods of slaughter on the rate and extent of post mortem glycolysis.	132
Chapter Seven : Observational studies of haemorrhages associated with slaughter of lambs.	158
Chapter Eight : The effect of different methods of stunning on blood pressure and muscular activity.	174
Chapter Nine : General discussion.	199
Bibliography	204
Appendix I : Measuring the pH of muscle samples.	218
Appendix II : Appended scientific publications.	219

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page number</u>
1.1 Lambs slaughtered during the 1981/82 season.	2
1.2 Location of meat export works in New Zealand.	3
1.3 Tenderness in relation to shortening induced by exposing meat samples to chilling (2°C) during onset of rigor mortis.	10
1.4 Mean ultimate shortenings of muscles at various storage temperatures.	10
2.1 The effect of time on pH values after iodoacetate homogenisation.	24
2.2 Relationship between muscle pH measured after homogenisation in iodoacetate/water or iodoacetate/potassium chloride.	28
2.3 Mean pH of control samples during a three months frozen storage period.	30
2.4 Confidence limits (95%) of means of samples from the LD.	49
2.5 Distribution of ultimate pH values of sheep LD.	52
3.1 Frequency distribution of ultimate pH of the LD in lambs from two different lines.	65
3.2 Frequency distribution of ultimate pH in the LD of 1536 lambs.	66
3.3 Normal probability graphs of the ultimate pH distribution.	67
3.4 Relationship between seasonal pattern of ultimate pH values and liveweight gains in lambs.	87

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page number</u>
4.1	The effect of farm of origin, washing and resting of lambs on ultimate pH of the LD. 100
4.2	The effect of washing and resting of lambs on ultimate pH of the LD. 102
4.3	The effect of breed and washing of lambs on ultimate pH of the LD. 104
5.1	Relationship between scoring of the nature of ruminoreticular contents and estimation of dry matter in sheep. 124
5.2	The effect of holding period and access to water on dry matter of ruminoreticular contents. 126
6.1	Mean pH values and temperatures of the LD of lambs stunned by either a captive bolt or an electric 'head-to-leg' method. 141
6.2	The effects of electrical stunning and low voltage stimulation on decline of pH of the LD. 143
6.3	The effect of low voltage and high voltage stimulation on pH decline of the LD in lambs. 147
6.4	The effect of low voltage stimulation and ultimate pH on irreversible contraction during high voltage stimulation. 155
7.1	Association between mean one stage prothrombin times and mean scores of speckling. 169
8.1	EMG record after expansion and transfer to chart recorder. 180
8.2	The effect of noradrenaline on ECG and blood pressure. 182

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page number</u>
8.3	The effect of 'head-only' stunning on ECG and blood pressure.	185
8.4	The effect of 'head-to-back' stunning on ECG and blood pressure.	186
8.5	The effect of 'head-to-back' stunning on venous pressure and duration of muscular activity.	188

LIST OF PLATES

<u>Plate</u>		<u>Page Number</u>
2.1	Biopsy instrument consisting of a modified cannula and trocar attached to a 20 ml syringe.	38
2.2	Plug sampling of a lamb carcass.	39
2.3	The LD from both sides of a sheep.	47
4.1	Washing of lambs in a swim-through bath.	94
7.1	Lamb carcass affected by speckling.	159
8.1	Sheep in restraining crate being stunned by the 'head-to-back' method.	176
8.2	EMG records from the LD following electrical stunning.	190