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effects of different freezing/thaw-ageing regimens on
physicochemical, biochemical characteristics and meat quality
attributes of lamb loins

A thesis presented to Massey University
for the partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Masters of Food Technology

Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand

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2015

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Abstract

New Zealand red meat is in demand around the world; consumers recognise the safe, healthy, clean and green values of New Zealand's pasture-raised beef lamb and venison. Meat is transported chilled in containers to overseas markets, and recently container ships have started to travel slower to reduce fuel consumption. This has resulted in the meat spending longer in the containers, meaning that key quality attributes of lamb cannot be guaranteed anymore. Finding an alternative method to provide the overseas consumers with chilled meat of the required quality is a top priority for the industry. Currently during container transport, meat is ageing for 6/8 weeks but with the newly introduced longer transport time to overseas markets it is too long for the meat in terms of food quality. Frozen meat is traditionally aged first before freezing. Previous observations show that 2 weeks ageing for lamb is enough to give equivalent quality attributes to the meat as ageing for 8 weeks. In the current study meat is frozen first and then thawed-aged and it was therefore hypothesised that by increasing the thawing-ageing temperature the ageing process could be accelerated.

This thesis focused on determining the effects of different freezing/thawing-ageing regimens on meat quality and physical and biochemical characteristics of lamb loins. To study the effect of the different regimens, 10 treatments were set up and 90 loins in total have been used. The loins were randomly assigned to three different freezing conditions named Slow Freezing (SF), Fast Freezing (FF) and Very Fast Freezing (VFF) followed by three different thaw/ageing regimens: -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C. A control group was included as treatment number 10, the Control group represents a non-frozen treatment with only 2 weeks of ageing.

The effects on the quality of the loins were evaluated through the use of quality measurements such as pH, colour, water holding capacity, tenderness and lipid oxidation. Other analyses used to give an indication of the mechanisms for any quality differences were histology and metabolomics. The data suggest that FF and VFF resulted in a greater water-holding capacity and colour stability than SF. Ageing at 3.5°C showed a general trend for accelerated lipid oxidation compared with ageing at -1.5°C and 1°C. SF seems to contribute to damage along the fibre whereas FF and VFF show obvious holes within the fibres. These different types of damage may lead to lesser or varying meat quality.

Overall, this work found that FF and VFF showed benefits over SF in several aspects of meat quality, but the differences were small. The results also suggest that FF or VFF could be used to avoid some of the common quality defects associated with freezing first and then thaw-ageing. This may potentially provide an opportunity for the New Zealand meat industry to utilise frozen storage/shipping and so saving money while still meeting the consumer demands for high quality fresh meat.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Table of Contents.....	7
List of Figures	10
List of Tables	12
1. Literature review	13
1.1 From farm to plate.....	13
1.2 The slaughter and carcass handling of lamb	13
1.3 The metabolic conversion of muscle to meat.....	14
1.3.1 Structure of the muscle	14
1.3.2 From muscle to meat.....	17
1.3.3 Changes in muscle structure during ageing	19
1.4 Freezing and Thawing / storage	20
1.4.1 Freezing	20
1.4.2 Thawing	23
1.4.3 Frozen storage	23
1.5 Meat quality	25
1.5.1 pH.....	25
1.5.2 Meat colour	26
1.5.3 Meat tenderness	31
1.5.4 Water holding capacity.....	32
1.5.5 Meat flavour	35
1.5.6 Meat structure.....	36
1.6 New Zealand meat industry and processing.....	37
2. Material and methods	40
2.1 Raw material & processing.....	40
2.1.1 Freezing processes.....	41
2.2 Meat quality attributes	43
2.2.1 pH.....	43

2.2.2 Purge and drip loss	44
2.2.3 Cook loss and shear force	45
2.2.4 Colour	45
2.3 Lipid oxidation	47
2.4 Data analysis.....	48
2.5 Histology.....	49
2.5.1 Haematoxylin and Eosin staining:	50
2.6 Metabolomics.....	51
2.6.1 NMR Spectroscopy	52
2.6.2 Spectral processing.....	52
2.6.3 Metabolite identification.....	53
2.6.4 Metabolomic data analysis.....	53
3. Results	55
3.1 Freezing regimens	55
3.2 Meat Quality Measurements	56
3.2.1 pH.....	56
3.2.2 Colour stability.....	57
3.2.3 Lipid Oxidation.....	60
3.2.4 Tenderness	62
3.2.5 Water holding capacity.....	63
3.3 Histological analysis	67
3.3.1 Metabolomics results	69
3.3.2 Metabolites in purge	69
3.3.3 Data analysis of the whole dataset	71
3.3.4 Data analysis of thawing/ageing -1.5 °C subset	72
3.3.5 Effect of ageing temperature	73
3.3.6 Summary of metabolomics results.....	73
4. Discussion.....	74
4.1 Introduction.....	74
4.1 Freezing rate and influence on muscle structure	76
4.2 Influence of freezing on pH	77
4.3 Freezing and the influence on colour.....	78

4.4 Tenderness	81
4.5 Water holding capacity	83
4.6 Metabolomics.....	85
5. Conclusion.....	87
6. Future directions.....	88
References	90
Appendix 1	95
Appendix 2	96
Appendix 3	98

List of Figures

- Figure 1:** Internal view of muscle split into various component parts (Baechle & Earle, 2008)
- Figure 2:** Diagram of a skeletal muscle and its constituents from top to bottom; skeletal muscle, a bundle of muscle fibers, a muscle fiber showing the myofibrils, a myofilament (Hendrick, Aberle, Forrest, Judge & Merkel, 1994)
- Figure 3:** The different chemical states of myoglobin, the colour of the meat is regulated by the oxidative state of iron in the haem group (Mancini & Hunt, 2005)
- Figure 4:** Illustration of DMB, OMB and MMB formation in the surface layer of a cut of meat by increasing oxygen exposure (Photo courtesy of Dr. D.H. Kropf, Kansas State University).
- Figure 5:** The colour of meat at various pH levels (MIRINZ, 1999)
- Figure 6:** Temperature decline rates of the lamb samples assigned to Slow Freezing, Fast Freezing or Very Fast Freezing regimens.
- Figure 7:** Effect of display time on sample Control (left) and SF 1 (right) after 7 days
- Figure 8:** Effect of different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing/ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C) on the shear force required to break/shear the loin fibres SED = 0.324
- Figure 9:** Effect of different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing/ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C) on purge loss (%) \pm SE 0.833
- Figure 10:** Effect of different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing/ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C) on drip loss (%) \pm SE 0.754
- Figure 11:** Effect of different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing/ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C) on the water holding capacity – purge loss and drip loss SED = 1.091
- Figure 12:** Effect of different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing/ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C) on the cook loss SED = 2.24
- Figure 13:** 1D ¹H-NMR spectrum of purge after regimens. Peaks arising from some common metabolites are indicated in the spectrum. Imidazole was added as a pH indicator

Figure 14: PCA scores plot of the whole dataset. Samples are coloured according the freezing regimens

List of Tables

- Table 1:** Schedule of freezing methods and thawing/ageing regimens
- Table 2:** Processing schedule tissue processor
- Table 3:** Effect of different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing/ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C) on L* value, a* value, b* value, Hue angle and Chroma value
- Table 1:** Effect of freezing thawing/ageing regimens and display time on the level of TBA (mg malondialdehyde/kg meat) SED =0.012
- Table 2:** Transverse section of the muscle at different freezing thawing/ageing regimens (SF, FF and VFF and thawing ageing temperatures -1.5°C, 1°C and 3.5°C)
- Table 3:** Metabolites identified in purge in order of decreasing concentration