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EVALUATION OF MEAT QUALITY IN COMMERCIAL PIGS IN NEW ZEALAND

SIMONE G. GELERA
1994

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Massey University
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*This thesis is dedicated to my beloved father (Atty Sergio Brillantes Gelera)
and to my late loving mother (Mrs. Anita Gallano Gelera)*

EVALUATION OF MEAT QUALITY IN COMMERCIAL
PIGS IN NEW ZEALAND

by

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation was undertaken of 144 carcasses at two abattoirs in the Manawatu region (New Zealand) to study pork quality characteristics. Surveys were made of farmers, transporters and abattoirs on how they handle the pigs before slaughter. Measurements were made of pH_1 , pH_u , colour (visual and Hunter LAB), water holding capacity (WHC) by filter paper press, drip loss and protein solubility of the *Semitendinosus* and *Longissimus dorsi* muscles.

The pH_1 was measured at 45 minutes. After 24 hours storage in the chiller, the pH_{24} and WHC were measured and after 30 minutes bloom, the colour measurements (Hunter L A B) and visual colour scores (0 = DFD, 1 = MDFD, 2 = normal, 3 = MPSE, 4 = PSE) were made. The protein solubility was measured within 48 hours postmortem and the drip loss was measured after 48 hours. The carcasses were subjectively classified as DFD (dark, firm, dry), MDFD (mild DFD), normal, MPSE (mild PSE) and PSE (pale, soft, exudative). Sex, breed, age, transport time, distance, last feeding time, weather condition, bruises and laceration/scratches, and stunning time were also recorded.

The total incidence of PSE_0 was 41.98 % in the ST and 72.41 % in the LD, and the DFD_0 incidence was 10.65 % in the LD and 36.05 % in the ST. Almost all the meat quality traits were highly correlated ($r = 0.35$ to 0.92) and highly significant ($p < 0.001$) with each other in both muscles used. pH (pH_1 and pH_{24}) was the most dependable technique used in this study. There is no obvious relationship between occurrence of pork quality problem in the pigs and the lairage period or transport distance. However, sex had low but significant correlations with pH_1 suggesting a possible advantage in treating sexes differently after they leave the farm.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF PHOTOS	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF APPENDICES	xii

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	01
1.1 Goals and Objectives	04
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	06
2.1 Introduction	06
2.2 Influence of pre-slaughter management on meat quality	04
2.2.1 Transportation	09
2.2.2 Lairage	10
2.3 Influence of hydrogen ion (pH) on meat quality	11
2.3.1 Initial pH	13
2.3.2 Ultimate pH	15
2.4 Influence of water holding capacity on meat quality	17
2.4.1 Role of protein in WHC	17
2.4.2 Effect of pH on WHC	19
2.4.3 Effect of ions (cations) on WHC	21
2.5 Influence of drip loss on meat quality	22
2.5.1 Effect of pH on drip loss	23
2.6 Influence of colour on meat quality	24
2.6.1 Meat pigments	25
2.6.2 Effect of pH on muscle colour	28
2.6.3 Colour variability in the carcass	28
2.7 Influence of protein solubility on meat quality	29
2.7.1 Myofibrillar proteins	31
2.7.2 Sarcoplasmic proteins	32

2.7.3 Effect of pH on protein solubility	32
2.7.4 Different solubility of muscle proteins	33
III. MATERIALS AND METHODS	36
3.1 Introduction	36
3.2 Pre-slaughter assessment and muscle preparation	37
3.3 pH measurement	38
3.3.1 Initial pH measurement (pH_1)	38
3.3.2 Ultimate pH measurement (pH_{24})	38
3.4 Measurement of water holding capacity	39
3.4.1 Filter paper press (FPP) method	39
3.5 Measurement of drip loss	39
3.6 Measurement of colour	41
3.6.1 Visual evaluation scores (wetness, colour & texture)	41
3.6.2 Tristimulus colour (Hunter LAB) values	42
3.7 Measurement of protein solubility	42
3.7.1 Measurement of total protein	42
3.7.2 Measurement of soluble sarcoplasmic protein	44
3.7.3 Measurement of soluble myofibrillar protein	44
3.7.4 Measurement of protein solubility	45
3.9 Statistical Analysis	45
IV. RESULTS	47
4.1 Pre-slaughter effects on pork quality	50
4.2 pH a tool to assess on pork quality	52
4.2.1 Initial pH	52
4.2.2 Ultimate pH	55
4.3 WHC a tool to assess on pork quality	58
4.4 Drip loss a measure of pork quality	60
4.5 Colour a tool for assessing pork quality	62
4.6 Protein solubility a tool for assessing pork quality	64
4.7 Overall result for all parameters	68
V. DISCUSSION	79
5.1 Pre-slaughter effects on pork quality	80
5.2 pH a tool to assess pork quality	82
5.3 WHC a tool to assess pork quality	85
5.4 Drip loss a measure of pork quality	87
5.5 Colour a tool for assessing pork quality	89
5.6 Protein solubility a tool for assessing pork quality	92

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion	95
6.2 Recommendations	98

BIBLIOGRAPHY	99
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APPENDICES

Appendix A Raw data	119
Appendix B Statistical analysis result	157
Appendix C Questionnaire	164

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Border values for the different characteristics measured for ST and LD	46
Table 2.	Summary of meat quality category for both abattoirs	48
Table 3.	Summary of DFD, normal and PSE at abattoirs A and B	48
Table 4a.	Summary of pre-slaughter data at abattoirs A and B that could affect pork quality	51
Table 4b.	Incidence of bruises and wounds on all carcass sampled at abattoirs A and B	51
Table 5a.	Meat quality category of the ST and LD using pH ₁ as parameter	53
Table 5b.	Frequency (%) distribution, mean value and standard deviation of DFD, normal and PSE for pH ₁	53
Table 6a.	Meat quality category in ST and LD using pH ₂₄ as parameter	56
Table 6b.	Mean and standard deviation of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ for pH ₂₄	56
Table 7a.	Mean and standard deviation of meat quality category in relation to WHC	58
Table 7b.	Mean and standard deviation of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ in relation to WHC	59
Table 8a.	Meat quality category in ST and LD using drip loss as parameter	60
Table 8b.	Mean and standard deviation of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ in relation to drip loss	61
Table 9a.	Colour characteristics of DFD, MDFD, normal, MPSE and PSE	63
Table 9b.	Mean and standard deviation of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ for colour	63
Table 10a.	Meat quality category in ST and LD using protein solubility as parameter	65
Table 10b.	Mean and standard deviation of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ for protein solubility	65
Table 11.	Correlation between the pork quality parameters of ST and LD	67
Table 12.	Summary of the result on different pork quality parameters subjectively assessed as DFD, MDFD, normal, MPSE or PSE	69

LIST OF PHOTOS

Photo 1. Typical PSE pork found during the study in ST and LD	72
Photo 2. Typical DFD pork found during the study in ST and LD	72
Photo 3. Typical bruises and scratches observed on a large number of carcasses	73
Photo 4. Possible causes of bruising and scratching	73

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1a. Mean percentage of ST and LD for each meat quality category at both abattoirs	48
Figure 1b. Overall result of ST and LD on DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ meat at both abattoirs	49
Figure 1c. Overall result of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ meat at both abattoirs	49
Figure 2a. Frequency (%) distribution of the initial pH of the ST and LD at abattoir A	54
Figure 2b. Frequency (%) distribution of the initial pH of the ST and LD at abattoir B	54
Figure 3a. Frequency (%) distribution of the ultimate pH of the ST and LD at abattoir A	57
Figure 3b. Frequency (%) distribution of the ultimate pH of the ST and LD at abattoir B	57
Figure 4. Frequency (%) distribution of WHC of the ST and LD at abattoir A	59
Figure 5. Frequency (%) distribution of drip loss of the ST and LD at abattoir A	61
Figure 6. Frequency (%) distribution of colour L (brightness) of the ST and LD at abattoir A	64
Figure 7. Frequency (%) distribution of protein solubility of the ST and LD at abattoir A	66
Figure 8a. Summary percentage of ST and LD in each meat quality category for all parameters	70
Figure 8b. Overall percentages of DFD ₀ , normal and PSE ₀ at abattoir A and B	71
Figure 9. Relationship between pH ₁ and pH ₂₄ of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	74
Figure 10. Relationship between WHC and pH ₂₄ of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	74
Figure 11. Relationship between drip loss and final pH of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	75
Figure 12. Relationship between colour L (brightness) and pH ₂₄ of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	75
Figure 13. Relationship between protein solubility and pH ₂₄ of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	76
Figure 14. Relationship between drip loss and WHC of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	76
Figure 15. Relationship between colour L (brightness) and WHC of the	

ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	77
Figure 16. Relationship between drip loss and colour L (brightness) of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir A	77
Figure 17. Relationship between drip and protein solubility of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir B	78
Figure 18. Relationship between pH_1 and pH_{24} of the ST and LD muscles at abattoir B	78

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A. Raw data.	119
a.1 Preslaughter (abattoir) data at abattoir A	120
a.2 Preslaughter (abattoir) data at abattoir B	123
a.3 Preslaughter (farms) data at abattoir A	126
a.4 Preslaughter (farms) data at abattoir B	126
a.5 Preslaughter (transportation) data at abattoir A	126
a.6 Preslaughter (transportation) data at abattoir B	127
a.7 Preslaughter (loading & unloading) data at abattoir A	128
a.8 Raw data on pH_1 and pH_{24} at abattoir A	128
a.9 Raw data on pH_1 and pH_{24} at abattoir B	130
a.10 Raw data on WHC at abattoir A	132
a.11 Raw data on drip loss at abattoir A	135
a.12 Raw data on visual evaluation score at abattoir A	137
a.13a Raw data on hunter LAB colour of ST at abattoir A	139
a.13b Raw data on hunter LAB colour of LD at abattoir A	142
a.13c Mean of raw data on hunter LAB colour at abattoir A	144
a.14a Raw data on protein solubility of ST at abattoir A	147
a.14b Raw data on protein solubility of LD at abattoir A	149
a.15 Mean of raw data on pH_1 , pH_{24} , WHC and drip loss at abattoir A	152
a.16 Mean of raw data on colour and protein solubility at abattoir A	154
Appendix B. Statistical analysis results	157
b.1 Mean, standard error, standard deviation and range values for the pork quality parameters of ST and LD	158
b.2 ANOVA result of ST on pre-slaughter effects with pH_1 as independent variable	159
b.3 ANOVA result of LD on pre-slaughter effects	

	with pH_1 as independent variable	159
b.4	ANOVA result of ST with pH_1 as independent variable	160
b.5	ANOVA result of LD with pH_1 as independent variable	160
b.6	ANOVA result of ST with pH_{24} as independent variable	161
b.7	ANOVA result of LD with pH_{24} as independent variable	161
b.8	Pearson correlation coefficient analysis of ST	162
b.9	Pearson correlation coefficient analysis of LD	163
Appendix C. Questionnaire		164
c.1	For Abattoir manager	165
c.2	For Farmers	167
c.3	For Trucking company	169
c.4	Form used in collecting the data	170

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Pork Industry Board is in the process of improving the visual and eating quality of pork as a consequence of numerous consumer complaints relating to the extreme variability of pork currently available in the butchery and food stores.

The demand for lean pork has increased slightly in New Zealand in recent years (Anon., 1993). The intensive production of pigs in New Zealand has rapidly moved towards the use of modern intensive fattening units. With this intensification of production, pork quality problems have emerged, especially those attributable to breeds (Pietrain and Landrace). These breeds tend to be more stress susceptible leading to a high incidence of pale, soft, exudative pig meat (MacDougall and Jones, 1975; Evan et al., 1978; Oliver et al., 1991). The occurrence of muscles with PSE (pale, soft and exudative) and DFD (dark, firm and dry) characteristics are undesirable since both give rise to meat of lower quality. PSE and DFD meat are the most important quality defects in pork (Briskey and Wismer-Pedersen, 1961). PSE meat has a pale colour, soft consistency, low initial pH (pH_{45}) less water holding capacity (WHC) and more drip loss. On the other hand, DFD meat has a darker colour, higher ultimate pH (pH), higher WHC and less drip loss than normal meat. Several studies have been performed to find out the causes of these defects (Briskey, 1964; Bendall and Lawrie, 1964; Dildey *et al.*, 1970; Asghar and Pearson, 1980; Honikel and

Kim, 1985 & 1986). Pigs carrying the halothane-gene are generally prone to stress, which may result in a higher incidence of PSE and thus lower meat quality than pigs without this gene (Lundstrom *et al.*, 1989, Archibald, 1991). These genes are genetically conditioned and activated by stress factors associated with the transport and slaughtering procedure (Wisner-Pedersen and Hamm, 1960; Barton-Gade, 1974 & 1979; Fortin, 1974), which leads to abnormal biochemical metabolism in the musculature (Briskey and Wisner-Pedersen, 1961a; Topel *et al.*, 1966; Bendall, 1973; Cassen *et al.*, 1975; Cassens, 1977). The handling of the animals prior to slaughter, as well as too short a resting period at the lairage within the abattoir also influences the development of both PSE and DFD as reviewed by Warris (1987). The incidence of (PSE and DFD) meat in commercial carcasses was recently estimated as high as 70% within the New Zealand industry (Confidential record, Massey University).

In Switzerland, the incidence of PSE is now 4 - 6 % of all pigs slaughtered at registered meat killing facilities (private comm., Dr. Patrick Morrel). Ten years ago the PSE incidence in Switzerland was 20 - 30 %. This reduction in PSe has been achieved by systematic screening and elimination of breeding animals known to carry the genes responsible for PSS and PSE. The Swiss pork industry is now in the enviable position of having less than 6% of slaughtered pigs with PSE meat.

Likewise in Australia, the average incidence of PSE and DFD was 32% and 15%, respectively; this varies from 5 to 65% for PSE and 0 to 45% for DFD (Trout *et al.*, 1991). The Australians are now trying to improve their pork quality by eliminating animals known to bear the genes that makes them susceptible to

stress and also improving their pre-slaughter handling techniques..

PSE development is usually attributed to increased glycolysis rate post-mortem (Briskey and Wismer-Pedersen, 1961). In DFD muscles, the muscle glycogen is already depleted before slaughter (Bendall and Swatland, 1988). This gives less glycogen for the post-mortem glycolysis and the ultimate pH becomes higher than normal (Lawrie, 1991). When PSE develops in a muscle, pH drops to values lower than 5.8 at 45 min post-mortem (Briskey, 1964). Normal muscle pH decreases from approximately 7 (living muscles) to values between 5.3 and 5.8 after 24 hours post-mortem (Wismer-Pedersen, 1959; Briskey and Wismer-Pedersen, 1961). High carcass temperatures (≥ 35 C) in muscles (particularly in PSE), combined with a low pH values (pH 6.0 or less) in the first hour post-mortem, causes the muscle protein to denature (Wismer-Pedersen, 1959; Penney, 1967; Honikel and Kim, 1986; Offer, 1991). This contributes to the pale colour in PSE muscle (Wismer-Pedersen and Briskey, 1961; Martin et al., 1980; Honikel and Kim, 1986) and also reduces the water holding capacity of the muscles (Wismer-Pedersen, 1959; Offer *et al.*, 1988). Offer (1991) claimed that denaturation of sarcoplasmic proteins in the PSE muscle had a major influence on the increased paleness, while denaturation of the myofibrillar proteins was responsible for the decrease in water holding capacity.

If pigs are exposed to stress prior to slaughter there may be an increased metabolic activity in the muscles (Bendall, 1973; Lister *et al.*, 1981). It is therefore widely accepted that both the rate and the extent of glycolysis of pork muscles after slaughter has a serious effect on pork quality.

Whereas much of the early research on pork quality clearly showed that normal pigs could produce PSE pork (Briskey, 1964; Honikel and Kim, 1986), normal pigs appear to produce far less PSE pork than PSS pigs. The PSE produced from normal (halothane-negative) pigs (i.e., Landrace breed) may have an exceptionally high drip loss (Eikelenboom & Nanni Costa, 1988).

In addition, PSE and DFD pork were recognized as major determinants of fresh pork consumption and in the economics of the manufacture of processed pork products (Hutchings, 1977).

1.1 Goals and Objectives

The goals of this research were; *firstly* to assess pork quality in two abattoir (Longburn and Levin) located in North Island (New Zealand). *Secondly* to evaluate the incidence of PSE and DFD, and to find out whether values for these conditions could be established for the normal population. *Thirdly*, to establish whether any of the following pre-slaughter factors affected the incidence of either PSE or DFD: sex, carcass weight, breed, transport time, distance of travel, time in lairage and time of year. To achieve these goals, a questionnaire was sent to the farmers, transporters and abattoir management and the meat quality traits (pH₁, pH, WHC, drip loss, colour, and protein solubility) were evaluated.

The *final* objective of this study was to establish whether there were differences in:

a) the rate of pH fall 45 minutes after slaughter;

- b) the final pH after 24 hours post-mortem;
- c) water holding capacity (after 24 hours post-mortem);
- d) drip loss (after 48 hours post mortem);
- e) visual scores (wetness, colour and texture);
- f) colourquest hunter L A B values (after 24 hours post mortem);
- g) protein solubility (within 48 hours post mortem); and
- h) PSE and DFD between Semitendinosus (ST) and Longissimus dorsi (LD) muscles.