

Lamb Marketing Transparency
A summery by Hans Porksen, NE Livestock Board Chairman
(June 2012)

(To be read with the Powerpoint presentation)

Slide 2 The background:

Until 1992 all lambs were slaughtered using one dressing specification, classified/ weighed and supervised by the MLC, who enforced EU directives for prime lambs sold live at auction markets or on a dead weight basis at abattoirs.

Farmers were very confident that the classification and weighing of carcasses was carried out correctly and independently.

Since then the MLC has been transformed into EBLEX, HCC and QMS and a company called MLCSL (Meat and Livestock Commercial Services LTD) has been formed which has taken on the role of carcass authentication and verification in some abattoirs. Since those days the classification and weighing of lambs both live and dead has turned into a fiasco with no supervision of any kind.

Slide 3&4 Killing Out %

The last available large scale survey was carried out by MLC in the 1980's and published in the 1985 MLC Yearbook.

47% Killing Out was the standard pre 1992 for a terminal sire cross prime lamb born in the spring and finished off grass.

50% was the standard pre 1992 for early born lambs in February/early March sold in late May/June. These were commonly fed creep while on grass.

42% is not uncommon these days with the most draconian dressing specification.

52.5% was the estimated KO% of the best Texel lamb going through the CT scanner at SAC in 2010.

58% is a figure reached by some extreme winter fair show lambs which have been on a high concentrate diet and have no gut content.

38% was a consignment sent to NCP . The lamb price collapsed while lambs were on the way south to an abattoir and the weight was adjusted to make up for the shortfall.

Slide 5&6 Dressing Specifications

The various dressing specifications can be confirmed by the booklet "Lamb Selection Training Day Presentation" for the Better Return Programme of EBLEX.(page15&16)

The 2kg loss of weight was reported to me by the operator of Sunderland slaughterhouse.

The loss to our industry is quite enormous.

The annual kill of lambs in England and Wales is approximately 12 million head of which about half are going direct to slaughter and are still owned by farmers when slaughtered.(See page 52 of EBLEX 2011 UK Yearbook)

If one took 0.7kg as the average loss this would represent a loss of 8.4 million kg @ 423.9p per kg (2011 average) this would come to:

£ 35.6 MILLION

What the actual loss is- who knows?

As we have no inspection and no independent verification nobody knows the answer.

Slide 7: Enforcement of proposed specification

59 major sheep slaughterhouses in England kill approx 95% of lambs (page 117 Eblex Yearbook) and slaughter over 15000 head per year. 46 of these are already inspected by the RPA under schemes involving pork and beef .

Smaller units usually own the lambs they slaughter.

The extra cost is only £ 8000 per year to inspect the rest. This is a figure given by the RPA meat inspection service to Defra in 2010.

The RPA meat inspection Service really are the only organisation who have the expertise and function to carry out this service, as they are already doing it with beef and pork.

Price reporting to the EU could also become more meaningful and accurate.

Slide 8: Rounding Down

This is in my opinion a totally illegal process and the NFU should insist that it stops.

The example given was for a group of lambs when the price was low,

A recent example in late November 2011 for a consignment of over 50 lambs showed a loss of over £ 3 per head entirely due to rounding down

Future Dressing Specifications:

In order to reward the improvements being made the more up to date SEUROP scale should be used. Very few lambs will fall into this category, but breeders of these lambs will be properly recognised and financially rewarded.

The VIA technology is making great strides and our levy boards must take up the challenge. NZ are claiming to make rapid progress with Saleable Meat Yield (SMY) analysis of jointed carcasses although my contact at Lincoln University informs me that these results have not been independently verified.

When Lloyd Maunder put VIA technology into their poultry slaughterhouse the benefits of VIA increased rapidly with the accumulation of data and improved efficiency.

On a recent visit to a sawmill in the Black Forrest I observed a VIA machine which resulted in the efficient sorting of wooden planks for parquet flooring. This machine made 154 decisions per second 24 hours per day.

Slide 10 Further considerations:

Hot/Cold Rebate: This should either be done away with and incorporated into the price or be at 2% for all carcasses.

Carcass Splitting; having now tested many hundreds of thousands of sheep brains even the FSA should confirm that the risk of BSE in sheep is virtually zero and this practise should cease.

EID and Feedback; for individual carcass reporting, which would benefit producers of breeding stock greatly, individual EID is essential. For commercial prime lamb producers batch/slaughter tags should be sufficient. The kill sheets should be sent to the producer on the day the animals are killed with an identified individuals signature so that problems can be resolved instantly.

Genetic Improvements; This has made great strides since the introduction of BLUP analysis and the availability of accurate EBV's. The sheep industry has been slow in its uptake as there have been no obvious financial rewards. However the potential of producing carcasses with higher SMY (Saleable Meat Yield) and a lot less fat is very good indeed.

Carbon Footprint; as the production of excess fat is very expensive as it takes five times as much energy to produce fat than producing muscle, the production of leaner meatier carcasses has great carbon footprint benefits.

Weighing at Markets; this presentation is about selling deadweight, however the deliberate inaccurate weighing at livestock markets leads to very inaccurate price reporting for live prime stock sales. I have sold in every market in Northumberland over the last 40 years and the loss of weight from farm to market has been between 1 and 4kg per lamb. As the deliberate inaccurate price reporting confuses the true situation Trading Standards should take this issue seriously.

Penning at Slaughterhouses this is a serious issue as on many occasions farmers believe that the lambs they are being paid for are not the ones they sent to slaughter. Modern well run abattoirs have excellent facilities. However even slaughterhouses killing 5000 lambs per day have been known just to have 2 pens in the past. This explains why I once got 17 E3L in a consignment of 25 mule lambs.