



Wagyu SA adds value with certification programme

The Certified Wagyu Beef programme, developed by the Wagyu Society of South Africa, aims to ensure integrity by offering proof that a product labelled as Wagyu beef is what it claims to be. It also provides assurance of the quality of the product.

In the first certification of its kind outside Japan, the Wagyu Society of South Africa (WSA) has started implementing its Certified Wagyu Beef (CWB) programme after extensive consultation with all stakeholders.

Ensuring the integrity of the beef product is one of the strategic goals of WSA. The main tasks of the CWB programme will be to ensure product integrity and provide a consistent message to consumers regarding Wagyu beef as a product.

CWB will also provide the Wagyu industry with the opportunity to market and brand the Wagyu product appropriately and protect the investment made by WSA members. All sectors of the Wagyu supply chain will be included, and this will ensure the product is traceable throughout the value chain.

The society is in the process of creating a Section 21 'not for

profit' company with its own CWB board. Serving on it will be representatives from the entire value chain, including the retail and food industry, abattoirs and producers. The society will thus have two separate entities: WSA itself will perform the traditional functions of a breed society, such as drive genetic progress, register animals and ensure supply of good genetics, while the second business will look after and certify the product.

WHAT IS WAGYU?

The breed definition of Wagyu beef in South Africa is any animal sired by a WSA-registered sire that is full-blood or purebred, with a minimum Wagyu breed content level for crossbreds (first cross) of at least 50%, and a maximum variation of 5%. Because every animal is registered, first-cross calves can be traced on WSA's database.

ABOVE: To qualify for certification under the Certified Wagyu Beef programme, the beef derived from a recognised Wagyu or Wagyu crossbred animal must have a minimum marbling score of at least 3%. PHOTOS: FW ARCHIVE

DEFINITION OF CWB

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has allowed WSA to be the certification body, similar to the Wool Board that certifies the wool mark in South Africa. The definition of CWB requires a minimum marbling score of at least 3%. Animals with a marbling score of less than 3% will only be used in the food processing industry. One of the protocols included is that no animal may contain any trace of hormones. In fact, it is speculated that using Zilmax, for example, negates marbling in Wagyu.

All animals have to have a CWB tag inserted by three months of age and this will remain with the animal until slaughter. All males must be castrated as soon after birth as possible, and at least before five months of age. Weight and carcass data must be collected at

critical control points to ensure slow yet continuous growth. The society has also registered the CWB protocol with SAMIC, which will conduct an audit on all value chain participants, including restaurants.

Each sector of the supply chain will have its business entity licensed to comply with the CWB programme at a small fee of R500 per participant and a R500 annual fee. The licence principles include the stipulation that the CWB licence certificate must be prominently displayed on the premises, and only registered full-blood and purebred bulls may be used to produce the progeny.

To ensure integrity throughout the value chain, each sector will be encouraged to purchase only Wagyu animals and/or beef from a CWB-licensed entity, and sell to a CWB-licensed entity.

Stud and commercial producers are already in the process of tagging all Wagyu progeny, including slaughter progeny, with CWB-trademarked tags.

INTEGRITY IS MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THE VALUE CHAIN

Producers are also providing the CWB office with unique DNA tissue samples and a list of registered full-blood/purebred bulls used to produce the progeny. To date, nearly 5 000 tags have been distributed and this will double within the next two months. The system has been set up to charge the key components of the value chain, from seedstock producer to abattoir, a fee per transaction.

CWB PRINCIPLES THAT REGULATE MEAT QUALITY

CWB is not a 'brand' but a scientific certification system built on the producer or retailer's own brand. CWB thus ensures integrity and



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proof that the product is Wagyu, and this provides an assurance of its quality.

It is known, for example, that the way an animal is raised has a marked effect of the eating quality (hence the saying, control the processes from paddock to plate). The audit includes factors such as the growth rate of the animal from birth to slaughter (by monitoring critical control points) and any by-products that were used. This ensures that the animals are properly tagged throughout the value chain, the carcass has been electrically stimulated, the carcass has been sufficiently chilled, and animals are not mixed prior to slaughter.

A carcass image will also be taken using a Japanese MIJ scanner, thus providing an objective measure of the marbling percentage, marbling quality and meat colour.

USING PARENTAGE AND GENOMIC TESTS

Traditionally, parentage verification uses DNA tests that link the animal to a sire (or dam, if required). Such verification automatically ensures traceability in the system. CWB will verify 25% of all animals using a new genomic SNP test.

The advantages are numerous and include the fact that carcass

data can be included in the Wagyu genetic evaluation to ensure that the best bulls with good carcass data are identified to be used as prospective parents. A Wagyu is fed in the feedlot for over a year, and marbling ability is critical. It thus makes sense to ensure that the CWB programme generates the required data to save costs over the long term.

Scientists associated with Wagyu are in the process of developing a genetic test that can be used on-farm at the birth of calves to identify animals that should be excluded from the feedlot. It will also identify animals that can be fed for a shorter period and will still produce the fine quality beef that consumers want to eat.

CONSUMERS TO EXPERIENCE WAGYU IN 2019

WSA has announced that it has secured an auction complex at Nampo. This seats over 600 people and will be the ideal venue for the more than 80 000 visitors to hear about and experience the product. For producers keen to experience Wagyu, WSA will also be at the Royal Show, Bathurst Show, Alfa Expo in Parys, and Aldam Stockman's School. It will also host a Wagyu conference.

• Visit wagyu.org.za or phone 051 492 1852.