

The meat that needs no sauce!

The Wagyu Breeders' Society of SA is finalising its Certified Wagyu Beef programme, which will certify breed content using a DNA test in all live animal sectors of the Wagyu supply chain.



According to Washington State University in the US, "Wagyu beef is the highest quality meat in the world." The university has spent more than a decade researching Wagyu genetics.

The demand for the product is extremely strong internationally. China, Japan, Europe, South Korea and many Middle-East countries are large importers of Wagyu beef. Wagyu products, which include steaks and

WAGYU BEEF HAS SOFTER FAT THAN THAT OF OTHER BREEDS, WHICH IMPROVES ITS FLAVOUR AND TASTE

Evidence from the US and Australia indicates that the marbling in Wagyu beef contributes not only to tenderness and juiciness, but to taste. Wagyu carcasses win most of the beef awards in these countries.

Meat Standards Australia (MSA) is a grading system with strict criteria regarding tenderness, juiciness and taste. More than 25% of Wagyu carcasses grade in the top 1% of MSA; the rest grade in the top 25%.

hamburgers, are sold in some of the top restaurants and outlets for extremely high prices. Over the next few years, however, this should settle down to a premium of 100% to 200%. And in the US and Australia, the growth of Wagyu cattle is showing no signs of slowing down.

In South Africa, major retailers such as Woolworths and Pick n Pay are keen to sell the product, but are waiting for the Wagyu industry to grow in order

ABOVE: The Wagyu breed is medium-framed and carcass weight is usually about 450kg. SUPPLIED

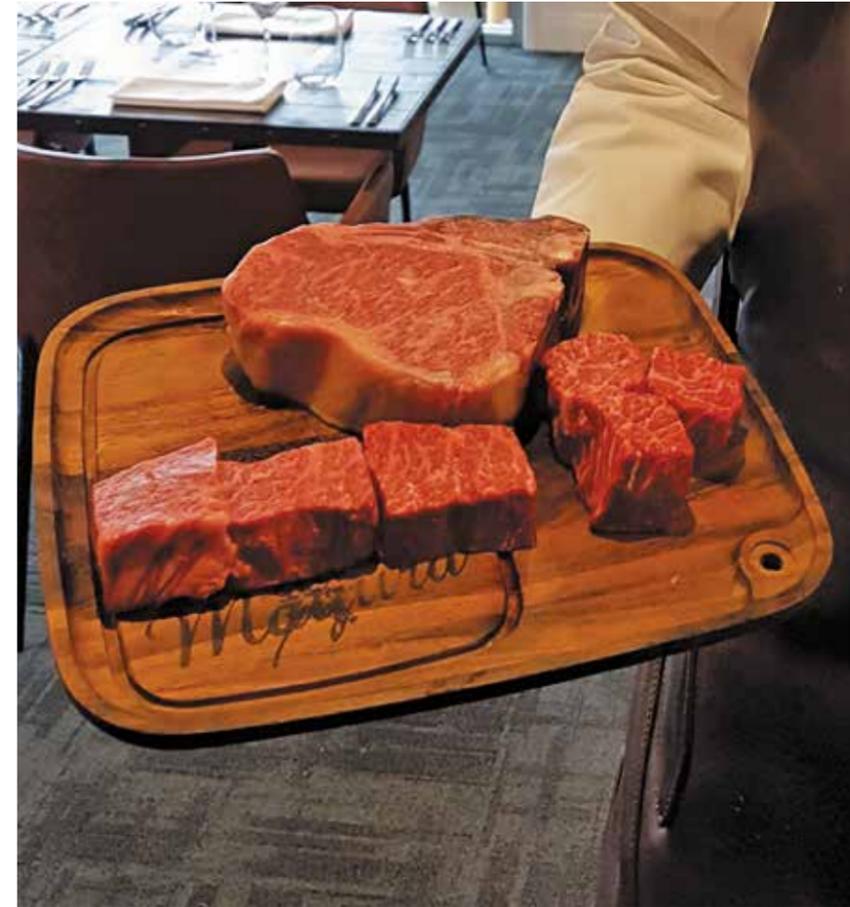
to ensure consistent supply. There are presently 100 Wagyu producers and about 3 000 Wagyu cattle in South Africa; to achieve sufficient mass market volumes, this needs to increase to between 200 and 300 producers and 20 000 and 30 000 cattle.

Large feedlots such as Sparta now also buy the breed. In addition, many small producer-owned feedlots are feeding Wagyu cattle.

Wagyus are long-fed for more than a year (between 400 and 450 days) on a special ration that enables the cattle to grow at about 1kg/day. This produces an animal weighing about 800kg, with a carcass weight of about 450kg. Carcasses sell at R80/kg to R100/kg.

HEALTHIER AND TASTIER

Wagyu beef has a softer fat than the meat of other breeds, which improves flavour and taste. This is due to the higher ratio of



mono-unsaturated fatty acids (MUFA) to saturated fatty acids.

The intra-muscular fat (IMF) or marbling of Wagyu cattle is twice as high in mono-unsaturated fat as that of traditional breeds, which results in a 'healthier' product. Researchers who first identified this higher level of mono-unsaturated fat in the Wagyu believe this is the explanation for the superior flavour of the meat.

Other research suggests that the fatty acids found in Wagyu beef play a role in cancer prevention. A review on the effects of fatty acids on breast cancer reports that concentrations of conjugated linoleic acid of up to 1% in diets is sufficient to provide significant protection from cancer, according to Dr Charles Gaskins of Beef Cattle Genetics and Statistics at Washington State University.

Marbling is the most reliable indicator of taste and tenderness. Wagyu cattle have been found

ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: Marbling is an accurate measure of taste and tenderness. Wagyu beef has 17% more marbling than breeds with the same marbling score. In addition, Wagyu marbling has twice as much healthy mono-unsaturated fat as that of other breeds. SUPPLIED

to have 17% more IMF by chemical extraction than cattle with the same marbling score.

Consumers have long been encouraged to eat lean meat, which usually requires a sauce to add juiciness and flavour. The demand for lean meat led to the breeding of animals with superior growth rates. In turn, however, this has led to carcasses that do not 'finish' well. Excessive leanness results in a meat product with an unsatisfactory eating experience because of a lack of juiciness, flavour and tenderness.

CERTIFIED WAGYU BEEF

The Wagyu Breeders' Society of South Africa is in the process of finalising its Certified Wagyu Beef (CWB) programme. This will certify all sectors of the Wagyu supply chain to:

- ensure product integrity;
- provide a consistent message to consumers regarding Wagyu beef as a desirable product;

- provide the Wagyu industry with the opportunity to market and brand the product appropriately;
- protect the investment made by WSA members.

The CWB programme will certify Wagyu breed content using a DNA test in all live animal sectors of the Wagyu supply chain. This includes compliance of the stud producer and commercial and emerging producers.

The programme will also certify the breed in the abattoir sector for minimum carcass attributes such as marbling score, carcass weight, marble fineness, eye muscle area, and meat colour in abattoirs that employ ultrasound cameras.

- Source: knowfood.cn/en/wagyu-beef/why-wagyu.
- Contact the Wagyu Breeders' Society of SA at 061 408 4123, or office@wagyu.org.za to subscribe to the society's newsletter. Visit wagyu.org.za.