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*Summary only*

**SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION AND GRADING OF MEAT CARCASSES IN NEW ZEALAND**

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FOR many years human judgement has been relied upon to measure meat quality. Butchers and their customers have used their sense of sight and touch to grade the meat. The commercial grading of meat carcasses began by using human judgement to place carcasses in a range of quality grades. Such a measure of meat quality would be highly satisfactory were it not for the fact that people have widely different opinions on what constitutes quality in meat.

Today the emphasis in meat grading is placed on the operation of a system of meat classification rather than a categorical statement that one carcass is better than another. This is in fact the only practical system of grading for a country such as New Zealand which exports to many diverse markets.

Many, but not all, meat characteristics are directly measurable, and of those that are, some are mutually exclusive and cannot be included in the one grade. The almost inevitable clash between lean appearance and flavour or juiciness is evidence of this. If assessment is to be made of the carcass or quarter a more limited range of characteristics are capable of being measured, but even to employ all the appropriate measures at this stage would be costly and time-consuming.

A change in methods of meat retailing and consumer demand is today resulting in some change in the weighting applied to the characteristics considered in the New Zealand meat grading system.

The justification for meat grading systems was discussed and it was concluded that meat classification benefits the consumer, those engaged in marketing as well as the producer. The historical development and operation of grading systems for New Zealand meat for export and local consumption was outlined.

Factors which affect meat quality were described and current specifications of quality in New Zealand export meat discussed. It was suggested that while "the customer is always right" a real difficulty in devising a grading system is to decide upon which customer is being served —

the butcher or the consumer — as in practice they often seek a measure of different characteristics of the product.

Likely changes to New Zealand meat grading systems (*e.g.*, yield grading of beef, nationally) in response to demands of consumer and retailer as well as to assist in the finding and developing of new markets for meat were indicated.