

# Package information on fresh red meat

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Survey on information available on the front of the package of freshly packed red meat (beef and lamb) available to the South African consumer through the formal retail market

This project involved an in-store observational survey of information available on the front of the package of freshly packed red meat (beef and lamb) available to the South African consumer through the formal retail market (butchers and national retailers across South Africa), in order to develop an understanding of fresh red meat labelling information. The sample consisted of butchers (n=37) spread across South Africa (surveyed in September and October 2013), as well as in-store observations at selected branches of national retailer chains in Gauteng and Cape Town. All observations were captured on the survey questionnaire and a Microsoft Office Excel 2007 data capturing sheet. Data analysis involved mainly descriptive statistics.

## The literature review:

A review of scientific literature (internationally and locally) and popular literature (national focus) on red meat quality attributes was conducted. A conceptual model of the quality perception process was also discussed, as well as a framework to define different types of quality attributes, i.e. intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues, as well as experience- and credence quality attributes.

In order to develop an overview of red meat attributes focused on in consumer research regarding red meat (beef and lamb/mutton), this section presents a summary table of 75 scientific articles in this regard (international as well as national studies). Furthermore, an overview of branded beef and sheep meat in South Africa was developed in order to identify the most prominent branded beef and sheep meat products available to South African consumers, in particular focusing on the attributes represented by the various red meat brands.

## In-store observation results:

It is critical to note that the bulk of fresh red meat sold at butchers (and a large share of the product offering at some national retailers) are mostly 'generic' with only the price and meat

cut (and packaging date in many cases) indicated on the product packaging. The study thus revealed very little innovation or more advanced characteristics or labelling claims. The dominant fresh red meat labelling claims observed at butchers (in order of importance) were:

- Product pricing (price per kilogram, price per package, weight of meat in package), Store brand, Packaging date and meat cut (widespread application).
- Less prominent labelling information: Mutton versus lamb, Unique product brand, Sell-by date, Flavour added (e.g. marinade, spices), Home storage instructions, 'Tender', 'Quality' / 'Quality guaranteed'.

Even though the fresh red meat offering at national retailers was somewhat more differentiated the bulk of fresh red meat at many national retail outlets are largely 'generic'. The dominant fresh red meat labelling claims observed at national retailer (in order of importance) were:

- Product pricing, Store brand, Sell-by date and meat cut (widespread application).
- Less prominent labelling information: Claims indicating specials or value-for-money; Unique product brand; Animal age (Some observations); (No observations regarding fat class); Other date information in addition to sell-by date; Lean; Extra lean; Low fat; Tender; Tasty; Juicy; Storage instructions at home; Cooking suggestions; Serving suggestions; Aged / matured; Deboned; Flavour added (e.g. marinade, spices)

The marketing and labelling of fresh red meat product ranges with more 'advanced' quality claims such as free range, hormone free, animal breed, animal feeding practices, animal welfare, etc. are significantly more prominent at some of the major chain retailers in South Africa.

From a red meat grading / classification perspective it was clear that the South African red meat retail sector does not generally utilise grading / classification info on labels.

The results imply that there is significant room for improvement in order to enhance the appeal and innovativeness of the red meat offering on South African shelves, in particular butcheries. This recommendation links into the red meat consumer surveys conducted recently – stressing the importance of understanding the needs of SA red meat consumers in order to work towards a more innovative red meat offering in SA retail shelves.

Comparing red meat labelling observations with what consumers are looking for when purchasing fresh red meat:

The dominant purchase considerations for both beef and mutton/lamb focused largely on safety, appearance, price and eating quality. Price was indicated on all labels, aligning with consumers' focus on price / affordability. However, only a few products contained affordability claims on labels such as 'special' / 'best buy' / 'butcher's choice' etc. Store branding was also common on labels, which could perhaps be linked to consumers' general quality perceptions of products sold at the particular red meat purchase outlet. Date information (e.g. packaging date or sell by date) was also common on labels, which is strongly

linked to product freshness and safety. However, almost no direct claims of food safety on labels were observed. Even though eating quality is important to consumers, labelling claims related to aspects such as taste and tenderness were not commonly observed. However, general 'quality guarantee' type claims were observed in some cases, but with uncertainty in terms of what is represented by the general quality guarantees stated on some red meat labels.

Comparing red meat labelling observations with applicable South African legislation:

The list of red meat labelling observations was sent to the following experts on meat labelling for comparison against applicable legislation:

- Hilda Pretorius (Quality Control Manager at SAMIC (South African Meat Industry Company))
- Maphuti Kutu (Division head at Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Sub-directorate Agricultural Product Quality Assurance)
- Mrs Antoinette Booysen (Directorate Food Control, Department of Health)