

RESEARCH BRIEF PRODUCT QUALITY

BEEF RESEARCH

United States Beef Quality as Chronicled by the National Beef Quality Audits, Beef Consumer Satisfaction Projects, and National Beef Tenderness Surveys

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Abstract

Meat quality is a very difficult term to define because it means different things to different people. When purchasing beef, consumers in the United States are likely to consider color, marbling level, subcutaneous fat trim, or cut thickness when determining the quality of beef. Once consumers have consumed the product, meat quality becomes exponentially more difficult to define due to the subjective nature of this term. Traditionally, tenderness, juiciness, and flavor have been considered the three most important factors that determine the palatability of beef. Therefore, American meat science beef research and industry focus has turned to measuring and quantifying these 3 attributes objectively and subjectively, and to determining what influences them. In reviewing the scientific literature, attempting to meaningfully summarize the findings of the thousands of studies on beef meat quality is impossible due to the inherent differences in the objective and methodology of studies. Fortunately, the United States beef industry and their national trade association, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), have conducted numerous surveys and audits to characterize the quality of the products being produced and marketed by their cattlemen and the palatability perceptions of their consumers. The data produced by these studies is quite large and impossible to summarize in entirety in this review. Therefore, this review concentrates on the most important attributes that determine the value of a beef carcass and objectively measured and consumer-assessed palatability characteristics of fresh meat from these carcasses from 1987 through 2010.

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