



Presenting clean livestock for slaughter

PGI Welsh Lamb is a respected product with a strong following in the UK and beyond. HCC is continually working to open up new markets including distant markets beyond Europe. HCC is collaborating with everyone in the red meat supply chain to extend the shelf life of PGI Welsh Lamb.

Increasing the shelf life of PGI Welsh Lamb is a key objective for the following reasons:

- **To increase the competitiveness of PGI Welsh Lamb in export markets;**
- **To reduce freight costs by utilising sea freight instead of air freight;**
- **To extend the seasonal availability of PGI Welsh Lamb;**
- **To reduce wastage caused by spoilage throughout the supply chain.**

New Zealand Lamb is setting the standard with 90+ days shelf life for vacuum-packed chilled lamb and up to 110 days for CO² gas-flushed lamb. This compares with PGI Welsh Lamb generally achieving a shelf life of 14-21 days.

Numerous factors influence shelf life but the condition in which livestock is presented to slaughter has the biggest impact on the potential contamination of the carcase.

If the animal is presented in a wet, dirty condition there is an increased risk that microbes will be transmitted onto the carcase during the dressing process. Any visible contamination on the carcase will need to be trimmed off, and the value of the carcase will be reduced. It is also crucial to remember that not all bacterial contamination is visible, but will be equally damaging and will result in premature spoilage and reducing the shelf life of the meat.

Clean Livestock Policy

The Clean Livestock Policy implemented by each plant sets out the standards for acceptable and unacceptable levels of animal cleanliness at the abattoir. Cattle and sheep are scored from 1-5, with 1 being clean and dry and 5 being wet and very dirty. Animals in category 1 and category 2 will be slaughtered without any further action.

Animals in categories 3-5, however, will require measures such as clipping at the abattoir, with the cost being charged to the producer. It is also possible that animals may have to be held over to the next day to allow time for them to be cleaned and dried. This adds cost to the producer and the processor and will impact on the potential shelf life of meat from those animals.

“It is in the best interest of everyone in the red meat supply chain to do all within their capabilities to increase the shelf life of PGI Welsh Lamb.”

Impact of on farm practices on shelf life of PGI Welsh Lamb

Make sure animals are clean and dry before they leave the farm, otherwise faecal and mud contamination on their fleece can contaminate the carcass inside the abattoir when the skin is removed.

In order to encourage clean and dry fleeces, you must remember:

- **Lambs should be housed and feed withdrawn for 6 hours prior to transportation, however water must not be withheld. Sufficient bedding such as straw or sawdust should be used when housing stock to aid with drying;**
- **During the spring very lush grass can cause the animals to have loose dung. Changing to a drier diet for a few days prior to selling is advisable. Any lambs with daggs should be clipped prior to sale;**
- **In the autumn, as the length of the wool gets longer, all lambs should be crotched and belly clipped as close to being sold as possible. Holding them in a dry yard or indoors on clean bedding afterwards is essential to maintain cleanliness.**

Are you considering using roots as a finishing method?

It's important to take the finishing method into consideration. If lambs are finished on roots, planting a grass runback will offer the lambs a clean area to lay down - this will aid a cleaner presentation. Additionally, the belly clipping of lambs must be avoided before they're introduced to roots.

Monitoring the cleanliness of stock regularly and reacting if their condition worsens can help to reduce the amount of clipping required. Clipping and dagging is time consuming and costly.

Transportation

Animals can become contaminated during transport, but there are some simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risk:

- **Always make sure the trailer has been cleaned and disinfected before loading a new batch of animals;**
- **After cleaning, new bedding such as straw or sawdust should be used in the trailer;**
- **The loading of wet animals must be avoided;**
- **Reduce stress by having good handling facilities, well maintained vehicles and ramps and by not mixing batches of animals;**
- **Vehicles with unsealed multiple decks pose contamination risks for the animals transported on the lower deck.**

Receiving dirty livestock has a significant impact on abattoir operations therefore a cost implication to ensure carcasses are clean. Line speed will be reduced to accommodate the dirty livestock which will consequently result in higher labour costs, utility costs and the risk of not being able to fulfil customer orders.



“It is crucial that cleanliness is maintained throughout the supply chain in order to successfully extend the shelf life of PGI Welsh Lamb – everyone has a role to play.”