



HERE'S A BIT OF TASTY INFORMATION...

Winter 2015—2016

IT'S DEJA-VU ALL OVER AGAIN...

Good things are worth repeating! Sometimes we are asked about information we've shared previously in our newsletters, and while we like to keep things fresh and interesting this is always a good sign that the information was useful. So, unashamedly, here again is an update of our most requested article from back in 2013, which explains some of the differences in lamb available here in the USA. We hope you'll find it as useful now as our feedback tells us it was then.

If you'd like to revisit a topic covered in our newsletters, or have some questions or a subject of interest about grass-fed meats that we can include in one of our updates, feel free to drop us a line at info@pilotbrands.com. We'd be delighted to hear from you!

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE, REALLY?

We're often asked just what the difference is between New Zealand, Australian and US lamb, and can be surprised at some of the misconceptions that are out there. Here's a little "Lamb 101" that we hope will help in understanding the characteristics of lamb available in the US market.

New Zealand lambs are bred almost exclusively for meat production, and are primarily Romney and Romney-cross (often with Suffolk, Coopworth and Perendale). The New Zealand sheep flock is approximately 30 million head; there are 19 to 21 million lambs processed each year of which 95% is exported. With a temperate climate there is plentiful grass and there are no lamb feedlots in New Zealand, all lambs are raised only on grass. The average NZ lamb carcass weight is approximately 42lb.



Romney



Suffolk

Australia's flock has a mix of Merino bred for wool, and commonly Suffolk/Dorset bred for meat. A common misconception is that Australian lamb is less desirable because it is bred for wool – this is simply not the case, as to maximize fine fiber wool production, wool oriented breeds are grown past the maximum age for lamb and their meat would be classified as mutton (i.e. it cannot be called "lamb"). The Australian flock is about 70 million head with approximately 20 million lambs processed annually, and around half of this is consumed domestically in Australia.

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Australian lamb is predominantly grass-fed, though there is some supplemental grain feeding especially when grass growth is reduced. The average export carcass weight from Australia is approximately 50lb.

The US lamb flock is much smaller than Australia and New Zealand at 5.3 million head. Lambs are bred primarily for meat production and common breeds are Suffolk, Dorset and Hampshire. There are approximately 2.2 million lambs and yearlings processed annually, roughly 2 million of which are lamb. Lambs are generally finished on grain and have a much heavier carcass weight at around 75lb. Almost all US lamb is consumed domestically with only about 2% exported.

Weight of Carcass (lb)	Cap-Off Frenched Rack Weight*			Cap-On°
	New Zealand	Australia†	U.S.A.	U.S.A.
26	11	11	11	15
31	12	12	12	17
35	14	14	14	20
40	16	16	16	22
44	18	18	18	25
49	19	19	19	27
53	21	21	21	30
57	23	23	23	32
62	25	25	25	35
66	26	26	26	37
71	28	28	28	40
75	30	30	30	42
79	32	32	32	44
84	34	34	34	47
88	35	35	35	49
93	37	37	37	52
97	39	36	39	54

* Frenched rack yield is calculated at 5% of dressed carcass weight.

† Australian 'heavy' export grade carcasses start at 48½lb carcass weight.

° US domestic frenched racks are often fat cap on, cap off is shown for comparison and the cap-on yield is calculated at 7% of dressed carcass weight.

The most obvious difference in the lamb from each country is in their size, which is best demonstrated in the size of the frenched racks processed from each. The above table shows the range of frenched rack sizes marketed in the USA from each country, with the darker shading showing the weight ranges where most of the racks would typically fall.

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This suggests that portion size may be an important influence in selection of lamb, of course as well as availability, rearing attributes, trim, leanness, consistency and price. As huge lamb fans, we know that there is excellent lamb available from all 3 countries; our suggestion is to weigh all of the above in making a decision. Consider who the lamb is being served to? Is a larger or smaller portion needed, for example serving a full 8-rib rack or a couple of large cutlets? How does the flavor profile of grain fed lamb weigh against the health and animal welfare benefits of grass-fed? How heavily must the lamb be trimmed before serving, how much is wasted, and what is the true portion cost? Is the quality consistent and available year round?

We also get asked about pricing and how NZ and Australian lamb can be competitive in the USA. There are no subsidies in these countries, so setting aside the fluctuations in international demand and currencies the major influencers are the costs of production and scale of the industries. The total flock numbers, annual lamb production and amount of lamb traded internationally clearly show the large scale of the lamb business down under that supports greater efficiencies. Feeding the animals on freely growing grass also avoids the input costs of feeding lambs on grain including feed, increased husbandry costs, gas and electric power used and maintenance of feedlots.

Additionally, a real cost to US lamb producers is predation which can reduce lamb production by 15% every year. Australia has much less predation, and there are no natural predators of sheep at all in New Zealand.

There are differences to consider, but there are similarities too. Almost all of the lamb (not mutton) in each country is produced from pure or cross-bred breeds bred for meat production. In all three countries the lamb is free of added hormones and must be less than a year old under regulations strictly administered by each country's government. In order to be sold in the US, all of the lamb must meet the same USDA standards for hygiene, production and labeling, and plants in New Zealand and Australia must be USDA certified for that reason.



Dorset



Pasture Perfect Beef—Pilot's delicious, juicy Pasture Perfect™ range of fresh tender beef is available all year-round. Never confined, graded for marbling to USDA Choice equivalent, non-GMO, not fed antibiotics with no added hormones, and always free ranging 100% grass fed. Beef as good as it gets!