

British Heritage Sheep

- New Tastes from Old Traditions

Results of Age-based Sheep Meat Tastings

NSA Sheep Event, Malvern July 2018

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1. Background

As part of the NSA Heritage Sheep project feasibility study, tasting trials were carried out at the NSA Sheep Event in Malvern in July 2018. Visitors were given samples of lamb (under 1 year old), hogget (1 to 2 years old) and mutton (over 2 years old) to compare for their eating qualities.

a. The Samples

It was important to remove as many potential factors which could produce differences in the eating experience, other than age. As a result, a number of selections and actions were taken:

- animals sourced from the same breed (Shropshire)
- animals reared on the same farm on the Welsh Borders
- all samples used the same cut (leg)
- all legs cooked in the same way by one chef at the same time in the same oven
- all samples were served cold.
- All the meat was hung at a butchery - two weeks for the mutton, ten days for the hogget and a week for the lamb.

The mutton animal was 4 years old.

b. The serving

Paper plates were marked 1,2 and 3, (where 1 was hogget, 2 lamb and 3 mutton) and the samples were placed by the appropriate number on each plate.

c. The questions

The visitors were asked to complete a form (attached) for the tasting. This asked their gender and age, and required a judgement about the tenderness, juiciness, sweetness, 'Sheep meat flavour', and degree of fattiness or greasiness of each sample. It then asked how much difference there was between the three samples in terms of flavour and texture. All these characteristics of the eating experienced were to be scored between 1 and 7, with 1 being a poor experience (tough, dry, etc.) and 7 being excellent (melt-in-the-mouth, very juicy, etc.). Finally, they were asked which sample they preferred overall.

2. Results

a. The Tasters

27% were women, and 73% men.

Ages were:

Up to 18 years: 3%

19-40: 18%

41-60: 24%

61+: 55%

The total number of tasters was 38.

b. The Tasting Results

All scores on scales of 1 to 7, with the higher the number the better the experience.

	Lamb	Hogget	Mutton
Tenderness	5.3	5.9	4.6
Juiciness	4.4	4.5	3.8
Sweetness	4.4	4.6	3.8
'Sheepy' flavour	4.5	4.4	4.0
Fattiness/greasiness	5.2	4.9	4.5

When asked 'How much difference was there between the samples, with 1 being none and 7 being a huge difference, results were 4.2 for flavour and 4.5 for texture. This suggests a significant difference between the meat from different ages of sheep. Finally, the visitors were asked overall, which was their favourite meat? Both lamb and hogget scored 43% and mutton 14%.

3. Conclusions

A caveat on these results is the fairly low numbers of respondents (38). The NSA intends to repeat the process at a later date with a larger sample to check the results.

Nevertheless, the tasters were unanimous in saying that there were significant differences in the eating experiences between the lamb, hogget and mutton. This would be in line with expected results, and would confirm the strong Victorian view that the flavour of sheep meat increases in complexity and depth with the age of the animal. It also ties in with the NSA's previous results on differences between breeds of mutton, which were also found to be significant, in a larger tasting trial with over 100 participants.

Of particular interest from these results is the result from the question what was your favourite sample? Only 43% said lamb, and yet to most consumers this is the only type of sheep meat they are offered by the mass market. It certainly indicates that there is a significant market potentially available for older sheep meat.

This confirms the basis of the NSA Heritage Sheep project.

NSA

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SHEEP AGE SAMPLING NSA SHEEP EVENT, MALVERN July 2018

About You (circle one) - Male or Female Age: up to 18 19-40 41-60 61+

SAMPLE 1

Tenderness: 1=*very tough* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*melt-in-mouth*
Juiciness: 1=*very dry* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*very juicy*
Sweetness: 1=*no sweetness* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*very sweet*
Sheep meat flavour 1=*v. strong* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*none*
Fatty/greasy 1=*very* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*not*

SAMPLE 2

Tenderness: 1=*very tough* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*melt-in-mouth*
Juiciness: 1=*very dry* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*very juicy*
Sweetness: 1=*no sweetness* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*very sweet*
Sheep meat flavour 1=*v. strong* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*none*
Fatty/greasy 1=*very* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*not*

SAMPLE 3

Tenderness: 1=*very tough* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*melt-in-mouth*
Juiciness: 1=*very dry* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*very juicy*
Sweetness: 1=*no sweetness* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*very sweet*
Sheep meat flavour 1=*v. strong* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*none*
Fatty/greasy 1=*very* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7=*not*

**How much difference was there between the samples
- a little (1) or a lot (7)?**

Flavour: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Texture: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Overall, which sample did you prefer (circle one)? 1 2 3