



Department of
Primary Industries
Food Authority

General Circular

General Circular 06/2019

Definition of Lamb in Food Regulation 2015

An important update from the NSW Department of Primary Industries, Biosecurity & Food Safety (NSW DPI) for all licensed abattoirs (domestic and export) in NSW.

Amendment to the definition of lamb in Food Regulation 2015

A process to replace the current definition of lamb in Food Regulation 2015 with the definition endorsed by the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee in late 2018 has commenced.

This change provides producers with a clear warning about when a lamb is nearing the point of no longer being a lamb so that the 'price cliff' faced by all producers once ovine animals pass this point may be better managed.

The new definition also aligns Australia's lamb definition with that of New Zealand enabling Australia to better compete in lamb exports.

The new lamb definition is supported by Sheep Producers Australia and the Australian Meat Industry Council.

The Australian Government has amended the Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Orders 2005 to enable the new lamb definition to apply in Export meat plants from 1 July 2019.

What is the new definition of lamb?

The new lamb definition is:

'an ovine animal that:

a) is under 12 months of age; or

b) does not have any permanent incisor teeth in wear'.

This definition provides for animals to cut one or both permanent incisor teeth - so long as they are not in wear.

NSW has commenced a process to amend the current lamb definition in Food Regulation 2015 as it precludes animals as soon as a permanent incisor has erupted.

The new definition will allow such an animal to continue to be sold as lamb until the point where any permanent incisor touches the upper pad when the sheep's mouth is closed.

When does this change take effect?

Recognising that industry desires a 1 July 2019 commencement date for the new lamb definition, from 1 July 2019, NSW will apply the new lamb definition in domestic and export plants (Tier 1 premises).

Tier 2 premises will apply the new lamb definition in the Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Amendment (Trade Descriptions for Sheep) Order 2019 once it becomes active on 1 July 2019.

Plants (domestic and export) will not be subject to compliance actions for applying the new lamb definition from 1 July 2019.

Once the legislation change is completed, Food Regulation 2015 will be amended to reflect the new lamb definition.

Will the eating quality of lamb be affected by the new definition?

Industry research undertaken as part of this change process showed no discernible difference to the eating quality of lamb with erupted permanent incisors (but not in wear) compared to meat sourced from animals with milk teeth only.

Industry research further showed that the extension provided to the length of time sheep may be termed lamb by the new definition is less than a month.

Resources:

- Factsheet - lamb definition

Further information:

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