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# MEAT SCIENCE

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B.Sc., Ph.D., F.R.I.C., F.I.F.S.T.



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BY

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PERGAMON PRESS

OXFORD · LONDON · EDINBURGH · NEW YORK

TORONTO · PARIS · BRAUNSCHWEIG

PERGAMON PRESS LTD.  
Headington Hill Hall, Oxford  
4 & 5 Fitzroy Square, London W.1

PERGAMON PRESS (SCOTLAND) LTD.  
2 & 3 Teviot Place, Edinburgh 1

PERGAMON PRESS INC.  
44-01 21st Street, Long Island City, New York 11101

PERGAMON OF CANADA, LTD.  
6 Adelaide Street East, Toronto, Ontario

PERGAMON PRESS S.A.R.L.  
24 rue des Écoles, Paris 5<sup>e</sup>

VIEWEG & SOHN GmbH,  
Burgplatz 1, Braunschweig

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First edition 1966

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 66-17788

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*Printed in Great Britain by Warwick Printing Co. Ltd., Warwick*

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## PREFACE

THE scientific study of food has emerged as a discipline in its own right since the end of the 1939–45 war. This development reflects an increasing awareness of the fact that the eating quality of food commodities is determined by a logical sequence of circumstances starting at conception of the animal, or at germination of the seed, and culminating in consumption. From this point of view, the food scientist is inevitably involved in various aspects of chemistry and biochemistry, genetics and microbiology, botany and zoology, physiology and anatomy, agriculture and horticulture, nutrition and medicine, public health and psychology.

Apart from the problems of preserving the attributes of eating quality and of nutritive value, it seems likely that food science will become increasingly concerned with enhancing the biological value of traditional foods and with elaborating entirely new sources of nourishment, as the pressure of world population grows. Moreover, a closer association of food science and medicine can be anticipated as another development. This will arise not only in relation to the cause or remedy of already accepted diseases, but also in relation to many subclinical syndromes which are as yet unappreciated. Such may well prevent us as individuals and as a species from attaining the efficiency and length of life of which our present evolutionary form may be capable.

Meat is one of the major commodities with which food science is concerned and is the subject of the present volume. It would not be feasible to consider all aspects of this vast topic. Instead, an attempt has been made to outline the essential basis of meat in a sequence of phases. These comprise, in turn, the origin and development of meat animals, the structural and chemical elaboration of muscular tissue, the conversion of muscle to meat, the nature of the adverse changes to which meat is susceptible before consumption, the discouragement of such spoilage by

various means and, finally, the eating quality. The central theme of this approach is the fact that, because muscles have been diversified in the course of evolution to effect specific types of movement, all meat cannot be alike. It follows that the variability in its keeping and eating qualities, which has become more apparent to the consumer with the growth of prepackaging methods of display and sale, is not capricious. On the contrary, it is predictable and increasingly controllable.

Those aspects of meat which have not been introduced in the present volume have mainly economic implications and do not involve any concept which is incompatible with the basic approach adopted. They have been thoroughly considered by other authors.

In addition to acknowledging my specific indebtedness to various individuals and organizations, as indicated in the following paragraphs, I should like to express my appreciation of the co-operation of many colleagues in Cambridge and Brisbane during the 15 years when I was associated with them in meat research activities.

I wish to thank the following individuals for their kindness in permitting me to reproduce the illustrations indicated:— Mr. J. Barlow, Low Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Fig. 6.1): Dr. E. M. Barnes, Low Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Fig. 6.6): Prof. R. S. Bear, Massachusetts, Institute of Technology, U.S.A. (Fig. 3.3): Dr. J. R. Bendall, Low Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Fig. 3.5): Dr. J. B. Fox, Jr., American Meat Institute Foundation, Chicago, Ill., U.S.A. (Fig. 10.1): Mr. K. C. Hales, Director, Shipowners Refrigerated Cargo Research Council, Cambridge (Fig. 7.2): Prof. R. Hamm, Bundesforschungsanstalt für Fleischwirtschaft, Kulmbach, Germany (Figs. 8.1, 8.2, 8.4 and 10.2): the late Sir John Hammond, F.R.S., Emeritus Reader in Animal Physiology, University of Cambridge (Figs. 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3): Dr. H. E. Huxley, F.R.S., M.R.C., Unit for Molecular Biology, Cambridge (Figs. 3.4(f), 3.4(g) and 4.2): Mr. N. King, Low

Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Fig. 3.4(e)): Dr. B. B. Marsh, Meat Industry Research Institute of New Zealand Inc., Hamilton, New Zealand (Fig. 4.6): Dr. H. Palsson, Department of Agriculture, Reykjavik, Iceland (Fig. 2.1): Dr. I. F. Penny, Low Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Fig. 8.7): Dr. R. W. Pomeroy, School of Agriculture, Cambridge (Fig. 3.2): Dr. R. K. Scopes, C.S.I.R.O., North Ryde, N.S.W., Australia (Figs. 4.1 and 5.3): Dr. W. J. Scott, C.S.I.R.O., North Ryde, N.S.W., Australia (Fig. 6.4): Dr. J. G. Sharp, Low Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Figs. 3.4(a), 5.4 and 8.3): Dr. M. C. Urbin, Swedish Covenant Hospital, Chicago, Ill., U.S.A. (Fig. 10.3); and Mr. C. A. Voyle, Low Temperature Research Station, Cambridge (Figs. 3.4(c), 3.6 and 3.7).

I am similarly indebted to the following publishers and organizations:—

Academic Press Inc., New York (Figs. 3.3, 4.2, 6.6, 8.1, 8.2, 8.4 and 10.2): Journal Animal Science, Albany, N.Y., U.S.A. (Fig. 10.3): Butterworths Scientific Publications, London (Figs. 2.1 and 5.1): Cambridge University Press (Fig. 3.2): Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, Melbourne, Australia (Figs. 6.4, 7.1, 7.4, 10.4 and 10.5): Food Processing and Packaging, London (Fig. 8.7): Garrard Press, Champaign, Ill., U.S.A. (Food Research) (Fig. 10.1): The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London (Figs. 6.2, 6.3 and 8.3): Journal of Agricultural Science, Cambridge (Figs. 3.2 and 4.8): Journal of Physiology, Oxford (Fig. 4.7): Journal of Refrigeration, London (Fig. 7.5): Royal Society, London (Fig. 7.3); and the Society of Chemical Industry, London (Figs. 4.6, 5.4, 8.5 and 8.6).

I am especially grateful to Mr. D. P. Gatherum and Mr. C. A. Voyle for their considerable help in the preparation of the illustrations. I should also like to thank Prof. J. Hawthorn, F.R.S.E., of the Department of Food Science, University of Strathclyde, for useful criticism.

R. A. LAWRIE

Sutton Bonington, July, 1964.

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. MEAT AND MUSCLE

Meat is defined as the flesh of animals used as food. In practice this definition is restricted to a few dozen of the 3,000 mammalian species; but it is often widened to include, as well as the musculature, organs such as liver and kidney, brains and other edible tissues. The bulk of the meat consumed in the United Kingdom is derived from sheep, cattle and pigs: rabbit and hare are, generally, considered separately along with poultry. In some European countries (and elsewhere), however, the flesh of the horse, goat and deer is also regularly consumed; and various other mammalian species are eaten in different parts of the world according to their availability or because of local custom. Thus, for example, the seal and polar bear are important in the diet of the Eskimoes, and the rhinoceros, hippopotamus and elephant in that of certain tribes of Central Africa: the kangaroo is eaten by the Australian aborigines and the whale in Norway and Japan; and, indeed, human flesh is still consumed by cannibals in remote areas (Bjerre, 1956).

Very considerable variability in the eating and keeping quality of meat has always been apparent to the consumer; it has been further emphasized in the last few years by the development of prepackaging methods of display and sale. The view that the variability in the properties of meat might, rationally, reflect systematic differences in the composition and condition of the muscular tissue of which it is the post-mortem aspect is gradually being recognized. An understanding of meat should be based on an appreciation of the fact that muscles are developed and

differentiated for definite physiological purposes in response to various intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli.

## 1.2. THE ORIGIN OF MEAT ANIMALS

The ancestors of sheep, cattle and pigs were undifferentiated from those of man prior to 60 million years ago, when the first mammals appeared on Earth. By 1–2 million years ago the species of man to which we belong (*Homo sapiens*) and the wild ancestors of our domesticated species of sheep, cattle and pigs were probably recognizable. Man's ape-like ancestors gradually changed to human beings as they began the planned hunting of these and other animals. There are archaeological indications of such hunting from at least 500000 B.C. It is *possible* that reindeer have been herded by dogs from the middle of the last Ice Age (about 18000 B.C.), but it is not until the climatic changes arising from the end of this period (i.e. 10,000–12,000 years ago) that conditions favoured domestication by man. It is from about this time that there is definite evidence for it, as in the cave paintings of Lascaux.

According to Zeuner (1963) the stages of domestication of animals by man involved firstly loose contacts, with free breeding. This phase was followed by the confinement of animals, with breeding in captivity. Finally, there came selected breeding organized by man, planned development of breeds having certain desired properties and extermination of wild ancestors. Domestication was closely linked with the development of agriculture and although sheep were in fact domesticated before 7000 B.C., control of cattle and pigs did not come until there was a settled agriculture, i.e. about 5000 B.C.

Domestication alters many of the physical characteristics of animals and some generalization can be made. Thus, the size of domesticated animals is, usually, smaller than that of their wild ancestors. Their colouring alters and there is a tendency for the facial part of the skull to be shortened relative to the cranial portion; and the bones of the limbs tend to be shorter and thicker. This latter feature has been explained as a reflection of

the higher plane of nutrition which domestication permits; however, the effect of gravity may also be important, since Tulloh and Romberg (1963) have shown that, on the same plane of nutrition, lambs to whose back a heavy weight has been strapped, develop thicker bones than controls. Many domesticated characteristics are, in reality, juvenile ones persisting to the adult stage. Several of these features of domestication are apparent in Fig. 1.1 (Hammond, 1933-4). It will be noted that the domestic Middle White pig is smaller (100 lb) than the wild boar (300 lb), that its skull is more juvenile, lacking the pointed features of the wild boar, that its legs are shorter and thicker and that its skin lacks hair and pigment.

Apart from changing the form of animals, domestication encouraged an increase in their numbers for various reasons. Thus, for example, sheep, cattle and pigs came to be protected against predatory carnivores (other than man), to have access to regular supplies of nourishing food and to suffer less from neonatal losses. Some idea of the present numbers and distribution of domestic sheep, cattle and pigs is given in Table 1.1 (Anon., 1962a).

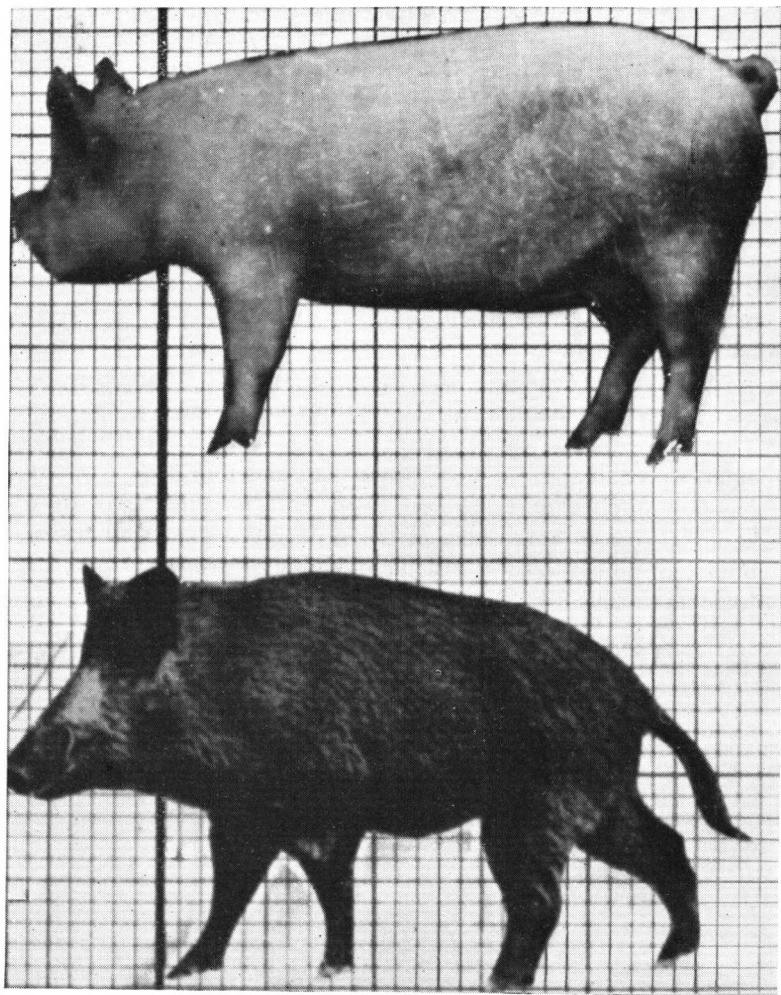


FIG. 1.1. Middle White Pig (aged 15 weeks, weighing 100 lb), and Wild Boar (adult, weighing about 300 lb), showing difference in physical characteristics. Both to same head size (Hammond, 1933-34). (Courtesy Sir John Hammond.)

TABLE 1.1. *Numbers of Sheep, Cattle and Pigs in Various Countries (1960)*

	MILLION HEAD		
	SHEEP	CATTLE	PIGS
Argentina	48.1	43.4	3.8
Australia	155.2	16.5	1.4
Denmark	—	3.4	6.2
France	9.0	19.4	8.5
Germany (West)	1.3	13.1	14.1
Hungary	2.4	2.0	5.4
Italy	8.3	9.4	4.2
Japan	—	3.2	1.9
Netherlands	—	3.5	3.0
New Zealand	47.1	6.0	0.7
Poland	3.7	8.7	12.6
Turkey	34.5	12.4	—
U.K.	27.9	11.8	5.7
U.S.A.	33.2	96.2	59.0
U.S.S.R.	136.1	74.2	53.4
Yugoslavia	11.5	5.3	6.2

The large numbers of sheep in Australia, New Zealand and U.S.S.R., of cattle in Argentina, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. and of pigs in West Germany, Poland, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. are noteworthy.

### 1.2.1. *Sheep*

Domesticated sheep belong to the group *Ovis aries* and appear to have originated in western Asia. The sheep was domesticated with the aid of dogs before a settled agriculture was established. Four main types of wild sheep still survive—the Moufflon in Europe and Persia, the Urial in western Asia and Afghanistan, the Argali in central Asia and the Big Horn in northern Asia and North America. In the United Kingdom, the Soay and Shetland breeds represent remnants of wild types.

By 3500–3000 B.C. several breeds of domestic sheep were well established in Mesopotamia and in Egypt: these are depicted in archaeological friezes. Domestication in the sheep is often



associated with a long or fat tail and with the weakening of the horn base so that the horns tend to rise much less steeply. The wool colour tends to be less highly pigmented than that of wild sheep.

Nowadays, about forty different breeds of sheep exist in the United Kingdom. Some of these are shown in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2. *Some Breeds of Sheep found in the United Kingdom (after Gerrard, 1951)*

(a) HILL BREEDS

Scotch Blackface	Cheviot	Welsh Mountain	Lonk
Herdwick	Derbyshire	Penistone	Rough Fell
	Gritstone		
Swaledale	Limestone	Exmoor Horn	Dartmoor
Kerry Hill	Radnor	Soay	Shetland

(b) LONG WOOL BREEDS

Leicester	Romney Marsh	Border Leicester	Lincoln
	(Kent)		
Devon	South Devon	Wensleydale	Roscommon
Longwool			Cotswold

(c) DOWN BREEDS

Southdown	Suffolk	Oxford Down	Hampshire Down
Dorset Down	Shropshire Down	Dorset Horn	Ryeland

The improved breeds, such as the Suffolk, tend to give greater carcass yield than semi-wild breeds such as the Soay or Shetland sheep, largely because of their increased level of fatness (Hammond, 1932a). Again, of the improved breeds, those which are early maturing, such as the Southdown and Suffolk, have a higher percentage of fat in the carcass than later maturing breeds, such as the Lincoln and Welsh; moreover, the subcutaneous fat appears to increase, particularly in the former. The English mutton breeds (e.g. Southdown and Cotswold) have a greater development of subcutaneous connective tissue than wool breeds, e.g. Merino. The coarseness of grain of the meat from the various breeds tends to be directly related to overall size, being severe in the Large Suffolk sheep: the grain of