

NEWS RELEASE

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Wagyu producers told Wagyu consumption has increased fourfold over the last year at annual AGM

Mr Johan de Vos, chairman of the Wagyu Society of South Africa and its subsidiary, Certified Wagyu Beef (CWB), told the Wagyu AGM on the 30th September that Wagyu in South Africa has experienced a fourfold increase in consumption of meat over the last year.

Where we used to slaughter 20-30 oxen a week, this has increased to 120-150 per week and based on international trends the society predicts that this trajectory will continue for at least the next two decades. He says that this increase can be objectively proven from CWB data collected at nine abattoirs, spread across the country.

He also told the AGM that over 90% of Wagyu carcasses are objectively graded using camera images for marble score and other traits. Marbling is the white flecks of intramuscular fat found in meat, most notably red meat and the Marble Score (MS) is an objective measure of the amount of marbling. Increased marbling is strongly associated with increased juiciness and flavour and is the single most important attribute determining the grade of the carcass in countries such as Japan, USA, Australia and New Zealand.

The higher the Marble Score the tastier the meat. Though cheaper to produce the South African market has traditionally focused on lean carcass meat that is devoid of the soft fat called marbling. Leading scientists agree that Wagyu beef is the healthiest beef produced and the mono-unsaturated/saturated fat ratio is up to 200% higher in Wagyu than other beef. Up to 50% of all marbling within a Wagyu carcass is made up of oleic acid (mono-unsaturated), while a smaller proportion is saturated fat. Wagyu has high levels of Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids.

De Vos also mentioned that the previous evenings World Wagyu Council meeting with international members confirmed the Worldwide shortage of Wagyu meat. Britain has a deficit of at least 40%. Japan imports a significant amount of product from Australia and even the USA cannot get close to fulfilling their demand. Some restaurants in Britain sell Wagyu burgers for 40 pounds (R800.00). Though we won't necessarily ever see this in South Africa, Wagyu undoubtedly falls in the luxury foods category. He urged consumers to eat Wagyu in the Japanese way i.e. in small portions and in fine strips (the higher the marbling the finer the cut). Wagyu is often paired with appetizers in small dishes. Wagyu biltong is becoming a South Africa favourite and is very popular at all the retail outlets.

De Vos reminded members of the difference that a year can make. "Last year this time, we had feedlots full of oxen but most restaurants and international markets were closed. We now have good markets that have opened both locally and

internationally and we are confident that we can continue to supply them unimpeded for at least the next 3 to 6 months” he said, but again cautioned that many more cattle are needed to meet both the national and international demand. Wagyu can be found in most upmarket meat deli’s and all the large local retailers are supporting the product. He mentioned for example that the feedback received from Woolworths regarding increased sales since their recent launch is very encouraging.

Dr Michael Bradfield, CEO of the Wagyu Society gave some statistics about the growth of the breed that has gone from 30 members in 2016 to 150 members in 2021. The number of fullblood cows (i.e. cows with a direct and unimpeded lineage to their ancestors in Japan) has increased from 430 in 2018 to 2,343 (30% above projection). Bradfield mentioned that the World Wagyu Council, of which South Africa holds the current secretariat allows a minimum 50% Wagyu crossbred to be defined as Wagyu. In South Africa, all Wagyu calves are parentage tested to the bull used to ensure compliance. The system implemented by Wagyu in South Africa ensures full traceability. The complete cow inventory has 14,440 cows breeding Certified Wagyu. Certified Wagyu Beef is fully traceable, has been DNA tested to ensure minimal breed percentage, and has a minimum Marble Score of 3. The Marble score usually ranges from 3 to 9+. A South African carcass with a Marble Score of 15 made international headlines in December 2020. Bradfield urged consumers to look out for the Certified Wagyu Beef logo on the packaging because this proves authenticity and reliability of the product.

Further details of the breed or a copy of the AGM report can be found on the Wagyu website at www.wagyu.org.za

About the Wagyu Breed Society of South Africa (WSA)

The Society is the custodian of the Wagyu breed Society in South Africa. Its offices are located in Bloemfontein and Pretoria.

About Certified Wagyu Beef (CWB)

CWB is a wholly owned subsidiary of WSA. Its mandate is to ensure integrity of the South African Wagyu beef supply chain and to assure the end customer of product reliability and quality.

Photo 1

This Wagyu made headlines with a Marbling score of 15. A South African record. Increased marbling is strongly associated with increased juiciness and flavour of the meat and is the single most important attribute determining the grade of the carcass in many countries.

Photo 2

The complete cow inventory held by the Wagyu Society has 14,440 breeding cows, compared to only 2432 in June 2018