

# Meat quality traits of Apennine suckling-lambs traditionally reared in two different seasons in Abruzzo region - Italy

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**INTRODUCTION** - In Abruzzo region a semi-extensive farming system, mainly of Apennine breed or its crossbreeds, is still widely practiced to produce a traditional lamb slaughtered at about 60 days of age.

The rearing system is quite well characterized, planning **slaughtering around Easter and Christmas** and envisaging the use of **pasture** from midmorning to evening till **December** for the sheep while lambs, reared permanently into the sheepfold, are fed at evening and night on their mothers milk, receiving a hay and concentrates supplement from 25-30 days to slaughter. Only **during winter sheep receive meadow hay and some supplementary foods**.



To evaluate the influence of the breeding season on meat characteristics, **80 carcasses of Apennine male lambs**, from single birth, **60 ± 3 days old**, were purchased, **half at Christmas and half at Easter**, from the same slaughterhouse.

Lambs slaughtered at **Easter** had a **similar carcass weight** to those reared in autumn (**9.4 kg vs 10.0 kg, P=0.15**), but showed a **pHu significantly higher** (**5.81 vs 5.70, P<0.01**).



**Meat lightness (L\*) and cooking loss of Easter lambs were significantly higher (P<0.05) while their fat content tended to be lower (P=0.10).**

The *L. lumbarum* fatty acids profile evidenced a similar composition in total SFA while **PUFA concentration was higher** in the carcasses of lambs slaughtered at **Christmas (20.32% vs 16.65%, P<0.01)** with a more favourable PUFA/SFA ratio and a **significant reduction of their n-6/n-3 ratio (2.60 vs. 3.98, P <0.01).**



**CONCLUSIONS** - These results are to relate to the typical farming system and to the larger amount of milk the lambs bred in Autumn received when the sheep milk production is stimulated by the availability of good pasture.