

CARCASS QUALITY OF SHEEP FED A SALTBUSH AND BARLEY RATION

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The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of feeding oldman saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) on hot carcass weight (HCW), fat content (expressed as % of fat in the carcass), meat colour, ultimate pH and tissue depth over the 12th rib (GR). Thirty-nine, merino hoggets (3 groups of 13) were fed diets consisting of either (1) 60:40 saltbush:barley, (2) 33:25:42 lupins:barley:oaten hay (control diet) or (3) control diet with added salt to the equivalent composition of diet 1 (control plus salt). These diets were fed for 10 weeks at an amount predicted to allow 60g/d of liveweight gain. At the end of the experiment, sheep were slaughtered at a commercial abattoir, carcasses were weighed and GR determined. Ultimate pH and colour of the *Longissimus dorsi* (LD) were measured 24 hours later. X-Ray Bone Densitometry was used to estimate the fat content of the carcass. Not all groups grew at the same rate and the control plus salt group had a significantly higher HCW ($P < 0.05$, $18.3 \pm 0.2\text{kg}$) than the saltbush ($17.2 \pm 0.3\text{kg}$) but not the control group ($17.9 \pm 0.3\text{kg}$). There were no differences in GR depth ($5.02 \pm 0.48\text{mm}$) between treatments but animals fed saltbush had a lower fat content ($15.4 \pm 0.005\%$) than the control ($P = 0.06$, $16.6 \pm 0.004\%$) and control plus salt groups ($P = 0.013$, $18.0 \pm 0.005\%$) when HCW was used as a covariate in the analysis. Diet had no effect on the ultimate pH (5.61 ± 0.01) or colour of the meat. In conclusion, feeding saltbush had no detrimental effect on the carcass quality but did result in a small decline in fatness.

Presentation Mode: Poster