

# US still tops for Aussie lamb exports

By CARA JEFFERY

DESPITE United States' consumers eating only half a kilogram of lamb per capita a year, the country remains the most important export market for Australian lamb.

Lamb has long been identified as the poor cousin to beef, pork and chicken in the protein consumption stakes in the US.

Despite this, the US is the highest dollar value export market for Australian lamb worth \$403 million in 2013.

While the Middle East and China are faster growing export markets, the US is ahead in dollar terms due to their penchant for high value carcase cuts such as legs, racks and loins.

The prime cuts make up 50 per cent of US lamb imports.

Speaking at the national LambEx conference at Adelaide, JBS US imports director Kim Holzner, Greeley, Colorado, said 40,000 tonnes of lamb was exported to the US from Australia in 2013, of which 45pc was chilled.

Mr Holzner said US lamb consumption had not changed much in the past 20 years, it sat at about half a kilogram a year compared with Australian consumption of about 10kg per capita per annum.



The US population of almost 320 million people is growing by 1pc a year annually.

Mr Holzner said he anticipated demand for Australian lamb would increase, as the population growth was primarily from immigrants from the Middle East, India and South America where there was an established culture for eating lamb.

Mr Holzner said the US was emerging from one of the worst recessions in 100 years, and lamb had made a strong return to the food service sector.

"Chefs see lamb as a point of difference to the more popular proteins, but lamb continues to be the most expensive protein which means restaurants won't usually put it as a permanent menu offering," he said.

The US's growing taste for lamb has Meat and Livestock Australia forecasting exports from Australia to the US will lift to 42,000t this year.

Mr Holzner said US consumption was particularly weighted around Easter and Christmas.



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"Producers need to tailor their production cycles to match this as best as possible, as the ultimate goal is to service these periods with large volumes to ensure the industry has year round business, particularly during the Australian spring lamb season," he said.

Mr Holzner said promoting the product, rather than the country of origin, would payoff long-term in the push to get more lamb on US consumers' plates.

"We need to lift the category of lamb and not plant a seed of

doubt in the consumers mind," he said.

"We all believe the quality of our Australian lamb is superior to other countries, but it's important for us as an industry to keep an eye on 'team lamb'."

Mr Holzner said Australia should promote individual characteristics that make their lambs "the best", but growing the category will also benefit the industry.

"With Australian lamb's inherent qualities, our product will naturally rise to the top," he said.

## Thornby SAMM cross Australia's best lamb

By CATHERINE MILLER

THE award for Australia's best lamb has been won by a family-owned South Australian Murraylands-based grain fed brand.

Paul and Alex McGorman and their father John, Thornby Grain Fed Lamb from Sanderston, claimed the coveted title of Australia's Best Lamb from 66 entries from across Australia.

The inaugural competition, held in conjunction with LambEx 2014, was open to producers, processors, wholesalers and retailers with

a commercially available, branded lamb product.

The winning lamb rack, announced at last week's AWI Grandlamb dinner, ticked all the boxes for top quality lamb with flavour, juiciness, aroma, tenderness and overall liking.

It was a Prime SAMM cross lamb which had been in their AUSMEAT accredited feedlot for 50 days and hung as a carcase for 10 days.

Thornby Grain Fed Lamb is available at Thornby Fine Meats, Tanunda, which the family owned until two years ago.

Paul McGorman said he was keen to also supply their award winning lamb to more restaurants and butcher shops.

He said it was a "real shock" to win the top award.

"It is nice to have industry acknowledgement we are on the right track," he said.

"We drafted them off into the right weight categories. Then we selected about half a dozen and then just picked the best.

"I looked at the head because it tells you a lot about the body."

The family began

branding their product five years ago building their profile at the Barossa Farmer Market and supplying some local restaurants.

But in a restructuring of their business, they decided to concentrate on pushing their 7000 head capacity feedlot.

The McGormans finish in the feedlot 2500 lambs from their grazing property at Coonalpyn and about 25,000 lambs from across SA, sourced mainly on-farm through a network of stock agents.