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# Variation in Sensory Properties of Meat as Affected by Sex Condition, Muscle, and Postmortem Aging

Steven C. Seideman and John D. Crouse<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

For several decades, the sensory properties of beef, particularly tenderness, have been of interest to the meat industry. Variations in sensory properties of beef have been attributed to muscle cut or muscle and postmortem aging. The objective of this study was to examine the sensory properties of five beef muscles, determine the contribution of connective tissue (i.e., collagen) to tenderness, and investigate the response of various muscles to postmortem aging.

## Procedure

Eight bulls and eight steers of similar backgrounds were slaughtered. The longissimus dorsi (LD; ribeye), psoas major (PM; tenderloin), semitendinosus (ST; eye of round), semimembranosus (SM; top round), and biceps femoris (BF; bottom round) muscles were removed from the right and left sides of each carcass 24 h postmortem. The muscles from the right sides of all carcasses were immediately frozen (24 h postmortem) while the muscles from the left sides of all carcasses were aged at refrigeration temperatures for 7 days prior to freezing.

After freezing, all muscles were cut into steaks. Steaks were used for sensory panel evaluations, shear force determinations, and compositional properties. Sensory panel evaluations were conducted using an 8-member panel. Panelists rated steaks for juiciness, ease of fragmentation, amount of connective tissue, tenderness, and flavor intensity. Cores (1.3 cm) from cooked steaks were also sheared on an Instron Universal testing machine equipped with a Warner-Bratzler shear device. One steak from each carcass and each muscle was powdered in liquid nitrogen and analyzed for percentage fat, amount of collagen (expressed on a wet basis and fat-free basis), and percentage soluble collagen.

<sup>1</sup>Seideman is a research food technologist and Crouse is the research leader, Meats Unit, MARC.

## Results

Sensory and compositional properties of five bovine muscles are shown in Table 1. The psoas major muscle was the most juicy and most tender of all muscles. Muscles were ranked in order of sensory ratings; PM>ST>LD>BF>SM. The amount of fat (intramuscular) was highest in the PM muscle and lowest in the SM muscle. The amount of collagen on a fat-free basis was ranked LD>ST>BF>PM>SM. The percentage collagen solubility was ranked LD>PM>ST>BF>SM.

Simple correlation coefficients between compositional components and tenderness and shear force at 1 and 7 days postmortem are presented in Table 2. The percentage of fat within a muscle was significantly correlated to tenderness at 1 and 7 days postmortem and to shear force at 7 days postmortem. The amount of collagen was negatively correlated to tenderness and shear force at 1 and 7 days postmortem, whereas the percentage soluble collagen was never significantly correlated to tenderness or shear force.

Mean values for tenderness and shear force stratified by muscle and postmortem aging period are shown in Table 3. Sensory tenderness ratings were not affected by aging period; however, shear force values were lower after 7 days of aging as compared to samples aged for only 1 day.

The results suggest that muscles vary considerably in tenderness, but neither the amount or the percentage collagen solubility are solely responsible for differences in the tenderness between muscles, although the amount of collagen was, by far, the more closely correlated to tenderness differences. The sensory panel tenderness ratings did not appear to reflect any differences in aged muscle samples; whereas shear force values were substantially lower for muscles aged 7 days, as opposed to muscles aged for only 1 day. Research is continuing to determine why muscles differ in tenderness.

**Table 1.—Sensory and compositional properties of five bovine muscles**

Property	Muscle				
	Longissimus dorsi	Psoas major	Semitendinosus	Semimembranosus	Biceps femoris
<i>Sensory properties</i>					
Juiciness <sup>a</sup>	5.3 <sup>b</sup>	5.8 <sup>a</sup>	5.2 <sup>b</sup>	4.9 <sup>c</sup>	5.2 <sup>b</sup>
Ease of fragmentation <sup>f</sup>	4.7 <sup>c</sup>	5.9 <sup>a</sup>	4.9 <sup>b</sup>	4.5 <sup>c</sup>	4.6 <sup>c</sup>
Amount of connective tissue <sup>g</sup>	4.6 <sup>c</sup>	5.9 <sup>a</sup>	4.8 <sup>b</sup>	4.4 <sup>c</sup>	4.5 <sup>c</sup>
Tenderness <sup>h</sup>	4.8 <sup>bc</sup>	5.9 <sup>a</sup>	4.9 <sup>b</sup>	4.7 <sup>c</sup>	4.8 <sup>bc</sup>
Flavor intensity <sup>i</sup>	5.7 <sup>d</sup>	5.9 <sup>a</sup>	5.7 <sup>cd</sup>	5.8 <sup>bc</sup>	5.9 <sup>ab</sup>
Shear force (lb)	13.39 <sup>a</sup>	5.49 <sup>d</sup>	8.83 <sup>c</sup>	9.37 <sup>bc</sup>	10.10 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Compositional properties</i>					
Fat (pct)	2.67 <sup>b</sup>	3.43 <sup>a</sup>	2.27 <sup>b</sup>	1.36 <sup>c</sup>	2.17 <sup>b</sup>
Amount of collagen (mg/g)	5.73 <sup>b</sup>	3.18 <sup>c</sup>	7.53 <sup>a</sup>	5.05 <sup>b</sup>	7.43 <sup>a</sup>
Collagen solubility (pct)	26.7 <sup>a</sup>	16.6 <sup>b</sup>	15.9 <sup>b</sup>	9.1 <sup>c</sup>	14.5 <sup>b</sup>
Amount of collagen (mg/g) fat free	1.54 <sup>a</sup>	0.56 <sup>c</sup>	1.25 <sup>ab</sup>	0.51 <sup>c</sup>	1.10 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup><sup>bc</sup>Means on the same line followed by a common superscript are not different.  
<sup>a</sup>Means based on an 8-point scale (8 = extremely juicy; 1 = extremely dry).  
<sup>f</sup>Means based on an 8-point scale (8 = extremely easy; 1 = extremely difficult).  
<sup>g</sup>Means based on an 8-point scale (8 = none; 1 = abundant).  
<sup>h</sup>Means based on an 8-point scale (8 = extremely tender; 1 = extremely tough).  
<sup>i</sup>Means based on an 8-point scale (8 = extremely intense; 1 = extremely bland).

**Table 2.—Simple correlation coefficients between compositional components and tenderness and shear force at 1 and 7 days postmortem**

Compositional components	Tenderness		Shear force	
	1 day	7 days	1 day	7 days
Fat (pct) . . . . .	0.39***	0.59***	-0.19	-0.40***
Amount of collagen . . . . .	-0.42***	-0.33**	-0.42***	0.32**
Collagen solubility . . . . .	-0.02	0.16	0.08	0.13

\*\*P<0.01  
\*\*\*P<0.001

**Table 3.—Mean values for tenderness and shear force stratified by muscle and postmortem aging period**

Tenderness parameter	Postmortem aging period (days)	Muscle				
		Longissimus dorsi	Psoas major	Semitendinosus	Semimembranosus	Biceps femoris
Sensory tenderness . . . . .	1	4.6	5.8	5.1	4.9	4.7
	7	4.8	5.9	4.9	4.7	4.8
Shear force (lb) . . . . .	1	17.5	6.9	9.1	10.6	10.8
	7	9.6	5.4	8.1	8.3	9.1

Mean values for tenderness and shear force at 1 and 7 days postmortem aging period are shown in Table 3. Sensory tenderness ratings were not affected by aging period; however, shear force values were lower after 7 days of aging as compared to samples aged for only 1 day. The results suggest that muscle vary considerably in tenderness, but neither the amount or the percentage of collagen, nor the ratio of collagen to total muscle dry weight, is solely responsible for differences in tenderness between muscles, although the amount of collagen was by far the most closely correlated to tenderness differences. The sensory parameter ratings did not appear to be any different in aged muscle compared with fresh muscle. Values were substantially lower for muscles aged 7 days, as opposed to muscles aged for only 1 day. Research is ongoing to determine why muscles differ in tenderness.

**Validation in Sensory Properties of Meat as Affected by Postmortem Aging**

For several decades, the sensory properties of beef, which tenderness have been of interest to the meat industry, variations in sensory properties of beef have been attributed to muscle cut or muscle and postmortem aging. The objective of this study was to examine the sensory properties of five beef muscles, determine the contribution of connective tissue (i.e., collagen) to tenderness, and evaluate the influence of various muscles to postmortem aging.

**Procedure**

Eight bulls and eight steers were slaughtered at the University of Missouri, Columbia (MO), semimembranosus (SM), longissimus dorsi (LD), and biceps femoris (BF) muscles were removed from each carcass. If it postmortem aged, each side of all carcasses were chilled overnight in the chill room (while the muscles from the left sides of all carcasses were aged at refrigeration temperatures for 7 days prior to freezing). After freezing, all muscles were cut into steaks. Steaks were used for sensory panel evaluations, shear force determinations, and compositional analyses. Sensory panel evaluations were conducted using an 8-member panel. Panels rated steaks for juiciness, ease of chewing, amount of connective tissue, tenderness, and flavor intensity. Data (1.5 cm) from cooked steaks were also obtained at the Union University testing machine equipped with a Warner-Bratzler shear device. One steak from each carcass and each muscle was powdered in a food mill and analyzed for percentage fat, amount of collagen (expressed on a wet basis and fat-free basis), and percentage soluble collagen.

Stehman is a research food technologist and Chow is the research leader, Meat Lab, ARS.

**Table 1.—Sensory and compositional properties of five bovine muscles**

Muscle	Longissimus dorsi	Semimembranosus	Semitendinosus	Psoas major	Biceps femoris
Collagen (mg/g)	1.54	0.52	1.36	0.31	1.10
Collagen solubility (%)	28.7	18.4	17.3	21.1	14.3
Amount of collagen (mg/g)	4.30	0.98	2.37	0.65	1.49
Fat (pct)	2.57	2.45	2.57	1.38	2.17
Compositional properties	13.59	9.49	9.83	9.37	10.12
Shear force (lb)	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3
Flavor intensity	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7
Tenderness	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7
Juiciness	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9
Amount of connective tissue	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9
Ease of chewing	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7
Sensory properties	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1

Values in the table are means for five steaks per muscle. Standard deviations are not reported. Means based on wet basis (n=3) are shown in boldface. Means based on fat-free basis (n=3) are shown in regular type. Means based on dry basis (n=3) are shown in italics. Means based on wet basis (n=3) are shown in regular type. Means based on fat-free basis (n=3) are shown in regular type. Means based on dry basis (n=3) are shown in regular type.