

Domestic market opportunities for a thriving future

Last year £559 million was spent on lamb in the UK and nearly half of the UK population (54.7%) buy their lamb from the retailer. Will Atkinson an account manager at Randall Parker who spoke at the NSA event said that through their company research, indications were leaning towards a slight decline in lamb sales with an average of lamb bought 6.6 times throughout the year per buyer. Specific cuts of meat were causing problems such as the roasting joint. Customers stated that lamb is uneasy to prepare with valuable time spent on clearing up and can make the consumer lean towards convenience-based products. It currently is a slow burner on persuading the consumer to buy lamb mid-week and not stereo typically stick to a Sunday where it is deemed to eat a roast.

The key to rectifying this problem is understanding the position within the market place. Richard Baldwyn who is a sheep farmer and diversified with a farm shop said that for him it has been a phenomenal year for lamb trade. He listens to what his customers want and rebranded some of his products to fit the market. He told the rest of the speakers at the seminar that customers wanted shanks, he adapted his product and that is what he delivered. He felt very positive for the future of the domestic market.

Another guest speaker Rizvan Khalid who is the senior director at Euro Quality Lamb informed the listeners of the current halal market and the current influence it had on domestic demand. Halal meat is ever on the increase with a substantial portion of the UK population being Muslim. In fact, there are 2.7 million Muslims living in England and Wales and a significant percentage of that figure are aged under fifty. The trends within this community are changing. The older generation previously bought cheaper cuts of lamb, saved their money or sent it back to their original countries. The younger professional educated, and affluent generation have more disposable income and are now demanding higher quality cuts of meat. This proportion of young Muslims consume more lamb, having a dramatic effect on the domestic trade. The halal sector is increasingly important to this trade with halal mutton unpinning the ewe trade. There has been an explosion in the UK Muslim community in the last three to four years with halal consumption orientated events contributing; making a significant impact on what they buy in the UK.

Halal consumption is not only affecting the UK, it is having an impact globally. Predicted figures demonstrate that the Muslim community will grow from 1.8 billion to 2.2 billion worldwide. France and Germany have large communities and even countries like China and the USA have an increasing Muslim population. These figures will have a knock-on effect to sheep sales nationally and internationally.

All the speakers were asked about a post Brexit stage and the uncertainty of the export trade within that period, but no one had a direct answer. Richard Baldwyn commented that food safety standards and regulations can sometimes be confusing for the consumer with too many schemes for them to understand. Richard felt that standardisation was key and to focus on one model that fits all enabling the consumer to clearly understand traceability and food quality.

Marketing also plays a role within the sector and is vital in sustaining the majority of sales. It has a large position within all concerned businesses and governing bodies. Complacency is something we cannot afford to allow though. What if there is a no deal scenario through this Brexit process? Domestic lamb consumption is level and people will pay the same level. However, the businesses who react promptly will out ride any uncertainty. Producers need to focus on quality and reduce costs for a sustainable market. Convincing current consumers to move away from convenience and investing in their sheep industry can be done regardless of the impending future. Increase

campaigns, target specific consumers and audiences through education and promotion. Simplifying recipes and driving realisation of the true benefits of the product will secure the industry so the public can continue to love lamb.