



Italian Journal of Animal Science

ISSN: (Print) 1828-051X (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tjas20>

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To cite this article: E. Piasentier, R. Valusso, L.A. Volpelli, A. Sepulcri, P. Pittia & S. Failla (2003) Meat quality of Italian Simmental young bulls as affected by the genes frequency of Montbéliarde origin, Italian Journal of Animal Science, 2:sup1, 328-330

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.4081/ijas.2003.11676001>



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Published online: 07 Mar 2016.



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Meat quality of Italian Simmental young bulls as affected by the genes frequency of Montbéliarde origin

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RIASSUNTO – Influenza della proporzione di sangue Montbéliarde sulla qualità della carne di vitelloni PRI – *E' stata misurata su 104 vitelloni di 16-20 mesi appartenenti a 5 gruppi, differenziati per la frequenza dei geni di origine Montbéliarde: 0% (22 animali), 12,5 - 25% (21), 50% (22), 75% (23), e 87,5 - 100% (16). Con l'aumentare del grado di ascendenza Montbéliarde è linearmente diminuito il punteggio di conformazione della carcassa, la cui lunghezza è invece aumentata. Le proprietà della carne maggiormente influenzate dal genotipo sono state il contenuto di collagene insolubile e la durezza, che sono entrambi aumentati con la frequenza di geni Montbéliarde.*

KEY WORDS: Italian Simmental, Montbéliarde genes, young bulls, meat quality.

INTRODUCTION – Italian Simmental (IS) is the most common dual-purpose breed in Italy. In the '90s, when high amounts of capital were invested for the transformation from tie-standing to loose housing stable, the farmers strongly stated their will for the improvement of milk production, udder conformation and of milk flow rate. The National Breeders' Association conceded a controlled introduction of the best Montbéliarde (Mb) bulls, the French strain of Simmental breed (Besozzi, 1996), which has been continuously improved for milk production. At present, the frequency of genes of Mb origin in the IS population is important, as proved by the Italian breeders' index: among the Rank90 bulls, 17 animals (out of 69) have >25% Mb genes (ANAPRI, 2002). Furthermore, two of the Italian bulls forming part of the best one-hundred European Simmental bulls, are 50% Mb. This probably modified both milk and carcass-and-meat quality, in comparison with qualities recorded before the '90s, when the less milk-producing and better conformed Simmental Bavarian strain was strongly prevailing (Bonsembiante *et al.*, 1988; Gigli and Romiti, 1989). The aim of the research is the evaluation of carcass and meat quality traits of IS young bulls, and their relationship with the degree of inclusion of genes of Mb origin.

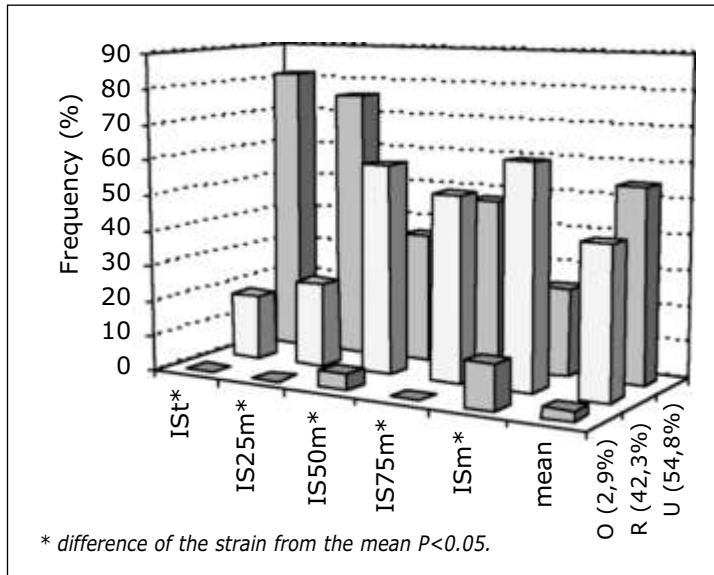
MATERIAL AND METHODS – The research was carried out on 104 young bulls of IS breed, belonging to five strains differing in the percentage of genes of Mb origin: 0% (traditional strain: IS_t; 22 animals), 12.5 to 25% (IS_{25m}; 21), 50% (IS_{50m}; 22), 75% (IS_{75m}; 23), and 87.5 to 100% (Mb strain: IS_m; 16). The animals were chosen among the bulls subjected to performance test at the IS National Association Genetic Centre, reared on slatted floor multiple boxes and destined to slaughtering. The young bulls were slaughtered at the age of 16-20 months, at homogeneous live weight (676 kg; std 47.7 kg).

Young bulls' live weight, somatic measures and morphological evaluation were recorded. Carcass weight, measures, fatness and conformation (SEUROP classification) were recorded 24 hours after slaughtering. Meat pH and colour (L*, a*, b*) were evaluated on *m. longissimus dorsi* samples. Other sec-

tions of *m. l. dorsi* were used to provide samples for: proximate analysis; total and soluble collagen; water loss (in water bath at 75°C) and shear force (Warner-Bratzler shearing device on Instron testing machine; ASPA, 1996).

Data were subjected to analysis of variance or covariance using a one-way factorial design, in order to examine the effects of the strain, whose levels were compared by orthogonal polynomial contrasts, using the SPSS 7.5.21 package for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, USA). The comparison between the proportion of carcasses of various quality was carried out by a chi-square test of independence.

Figure 1. Carcass conformation scores.



RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS – The five young bulls strains showed similar daily gains (on average: 1250 g/d) and carcass weights, which averaged 383.5 kg (s.e. 30.32 kg), with a mean dressing percentage equal to 56.7% (s.e. 2.00 %). The carcass conformation scores decreased linearly as the frequency of Mb genes increased (Figure 1), while the fatness scores kept a steady-state leaning across the experimental groups (average score 2.6, on a five points scale).

The linear trend of the carcass length, estimated at a constant weight, showed an opposite slope in comparison to the conformation one, so that the less scored ISm strain bulls had the longest carcass (ISm 140.9 cm vs ISt 138.5 cm).

The ultimate pH did not vary between strains and its values fell within the normal pH range accepted for commercial meats (Table 1).

Meat colour was slightly affected by genotype, showing a tendency to become progressively darker, a deeper red and yellow, with the increase of the proportion of genes of Mb origin. Meat proximate composition changed little with genotype, while both, the absolute and relative insoluble collagen content, increased with the frequency of Mb genes (Table 2). In the same way, even the toughness of cooked meat increased as the frequency of French ascendance increased.

Table 1. pH, colour and cooking losses of meat (*m. longissimus dorsi*).

Strain	pH	Colour			Cooking losses (%)
		L*	a*	b*	
ISt	5.48	41.1	22.4	4.74	31.1
IS25m	5.52	40.3	23.3	5.46	30.8
IS50m	5.53	41.0	23.5	5.69	29.5
IS75m	5.50	40.0	23.9	5.77	30.9
ISm	5.50	39.6	23.2	5.56	30.3
mean	5.51	40.5	23.2	5.43	30.5
s.e.	0.090	2.58	1.89	1.251	3.98
P linear contrast	ns	0.08	ns	0.04	ns

Table 2. Meat collagen composition and hardness (*m. longissimus dorsi*).

Strain	Total collagen (mg/g meat)	Insoluble collagen (mg/g meat)	Insolubility (%)	WB shear force (N)
ISt	4.76	3.62	76.8	46.1
IS25m	4.78	3.66	76.6	52.5
IS50m	5.26	4.13	79.0	54.5
IS75m	5.23	4.09	78.6	57.6
ISm	5.17	4.14	81.1	61.4
mean	5.03	3.91	78.2	54.1
s.e.	1.039	0.778	7.45	15.03
P linear contrast	ns	0.01	0.06	0.002

The inclusion of Mb genes in the IS population has significant effects on carcass and meat traits that should be taken into consideration in the breeding programmes of the dual purpose Italian breed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – Thanks to director and technicians of the Italian Simmental Breeders' Association for the co-operation in animal procurement.

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