The beef marketing chain is complex. It can be very short with retailers purchasing directly from producers using service kill facilities but it can also be long. An individual animal could change hands many times before it is finally slaughtered and sold in the retail outlets. The various players in the supply chain for beef are shown below.

Seedstock producers
The seedstock sector produces genetics for use in the wider commercial beef industry.

Step 1: Commercial producers
More than 70,000 beef producers operate as family farms, trusts or private or public companies. Australia currently has 27 million head of cattle.

Agents
Agents are middlemen, coordinating livestock marketing by bringing together a buyer and seller in the market.

Step 2: Backgrounder
Backgrounder buy in stock from breeders or grow out stock for clients on a per kilogram basis.

Commission buyers
Commission buyers purchase cattle on a per head rate on behalf of participants further down the marketing chain. These are processors, feedlots, wholesalers or retailers.
Step 3: Finishers

Finishers are feedlots or grass finishers, depending on whether they target cattle for markets that specify grain finishing or grass finishing.

Step 4: Processors

Processors' primary role is to slaughter cattle. Cattle are either slaughtered for a fee for wholesalers or slaughtered and marketed by the processing company.

Step 5: Exporters

Exporters fill overseas orders for beef and market by the container load to overseas importers.

Step 6: Importers

Importers buy in product from overseas and distribute to wholesalers.

Step 7: Wholesalers

Wholesalers act as middlemen between processors, importers, the food service sector and retailers.

Step 8: Retailers

Retailers market beef to consumers through retail outlets. In Australia, these are either butchers' shops or supermarkets.

Further references

- Breedplan: breedplan.une.edu.au
- NSW Agriculture: www.agric.nsw.gov.au
- Meat and Livestock Australia: www.mla.com.au
- Meat Standards Australia: msa.une.edu.au/
- Australian Quarantine Inspection Service: www.aqis.gov.au
- Australian Meat Council (AMC): www.amc.asn.au

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The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (December, 2004). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Agriculture or the user’s independent adviser.