**Media release**

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**NZ scientists lead the charge to explore benefits of pasture-raised beef and lamb**

**New Zealanders will be invited to take part in a major research programme to assess the health and well-being benefits of eating pasture-raised beef and lamb, compared to grain-finished meat and plant-based alternatives.**

Approximately 100 people will be monitored in two ground-breaking clinical studies, led by researchers from AgResearch, the Riddet Institute and the University of Auckland.

The projects will assess the physical effect on our bodies from eating the different foods for up to 10 weeks, as well as psychological elements, such as satisfaction, sleep and stress levels.

The research team includes meat scientists, agricultural academics, dietitians, behavioural experts and social scientists.

Sirma Karapeeva, Meat Industry Association Chief Executive, is excited by the programme of research being undertaken by Meat Industry Association’s Innovation arm.

She said much of the global research on the health, nutritional and environmental aspects of red meat was based on intensive grain-finished farming systems.

“However, New Zealand specialises in free-range livestock farming that is naturally pasture-raised, antibiotic-free and hormone-free.

“We know there are myths and misinformation about the production and benefits of eating red meat, so we have turned to research to help bring balance to what consumers are hearing.

“Nutritionists tell us moderate amounts of red meat can be an important part of a well-balanced diet, and this research aims to build on the substantial credible evidence that underpins this advice.

“Consumers are choosing to make ideological decisions about what they eat.

“In part, this is a backlash against broken food systems, such as factory farming and ‘big food’. There is a growing consumer desire for better quality food produced from natural systems, which supports a strong future for ‘real’ red meat as produced in New Zealand.

“Research shows there is untapped global demand for natural beef and lamb raised on grass pastures and consumers are prepared to pay a premium for it.

“New Zealand farmers have a compelling story to tell about our natural farming systems and a strong point of difference against many of our international competitors. The red meat sector is working hard to ensure that story is heard by buyers and consumers around the world.”

The initial stages of the programme are led by AgResearch and the Riddet Institute. AgResearch will develop nutritional profiles and the Riddet Institute will undertake lab-based (or “in vitro”) digestive analysis of the products.

Results from these two studies will provide baseline data about pasture-raised beef and its consumption in comparison to other foods.

University of Auckland researchers will then oversee the final two stages, investigating both the short-term and long-term well-being and health benefits of red meat consumption.

The highlight of the programme, a sustained clinical study, will see members of 40 households on a managed flexitarian dietary regime over 10 weeks. The participants will be monitored over the course of the study and changes in health status, behaviours and attitudes and perceptual well-being recorded.

Senior scientist Dr Emma Bermingham of AgResearch said: “We will carry out an advanced analysis of red meat, looking at its unique components, such as bioactive lipids and minerals, that make red meat such a nutritious form of protein when included as part of a balanced healthy diet.”

Doctors Mike Boland and Lovedeep Kaur, both senior scientists at the Riddet Institute, will demonstrate how the human digestive system responds to the differing food compositions to release the nutritious proteins and lipids for the body to use.

“We will examine how well these three contrasting foods are digested, using gastric simulation techniques,” says Dr Boland.

Dr Andrea Braakhuis, an Academic Director and Research Dietitian at The University of Auckland, and her team will examine how the beneficial lipids and nutrients from a single meal are absorbed and utilised by the body, before moving to the longer 10-week study where health and well-being benefits of red meat as a part of a balanced diet will be the focus for the researchers.

The research is supported by Meat Industry Association Innovation Ltd (MIA Innovation) and jointly funded with Beef + Lamb New Zealand Ltd (B+LNZ), the High-Value Nutrition National Science (Challenge (<https://www.highvaluenutrition.co.nz/> and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).

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