

From the Editor

# What is meat?

Perspectives of the American Meat Science Association

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What is meat? It sounds like such a simple question to answer. The majority of people in the world consume meat, so surely we all know what exactly meat is. But it turns out that creating a straightforward definition of meat is much harder than it first appears. While most people in the United States would point to items like steaks, hamburgers, bacon, and ham as being meat, what about chicken and fish? Are these meat or should they be classified as “poultry” and “seafood,” respectively?

Included in this issue of *Animal Frontiers* is the position of the American Meat Science Association (AMSA) regarding the definition of meat:

Meat (/mēt/, *noun*): Skeletal muscle and its associated tissues derived from mammalian, avian, reptilian, amphibian, and aquatic species commonly harvested for human consumption. Edible offal consisting of organs and non-skeletal muscle tissues also are considered meat.

The American Meat Science Association has also developed a lexicon of meat-related terms, which is in essence, a glossary of terms that can be used by many groups to ensure we are all speaking the same language. Dennis Seaman (2017) describes the AMSA Meat Lexicon Committee and how its lexicon can and should be used to harmonize discussions of meat among disparate groups. Then Dustin Boler and Dale Woerner (2017) in their article, “What is Meat? A perspective from the American Meat Science Association,” describe the overarching term “meat” and all that it includes along with some aspects of what is *not* meat.

The next articles in this issue then delve deeper into categories within that definition. Wes Schilling (2017) along with co-authors Casey Owens and Xue Zhang make the case that poultry and seafood are indeed meat. From the University of Florida, Chad Carr, Dwain Johnson, and Jason Scheffler (2017) discuss the definition of processed meat, a recent area of public health interest. While not widely consumed in the United States, variety or organ meat is an important product for export to the rest of the world; it is discussed by Dan Schaefer and Travis Arp (2017) in their article.

Finally, the last two articles in this AMSA-focused section of *Animal Frontiers*, address some of the confusion about meat definitions. While it is easy to talk about red and white meat, a closer inspection reveals that those terms are misleading and, when used, can lead to generalizations are not factual. Michael Dikeman and Jimmy Keeton (2017) take on this issue in their article, “‘Red’ and ‘White’ Meats—Terms that Lead to Confusion.” Then, Shalene McNeill, Keith Belk, Wayne Campbell, and Cody Gifford (2017) discuss the inconsistency in meat terms and what effect that has on nutrition research and consumers. It is clear to see that when we are not all talking about the same thing, confusion will arise.

Overall, the goal of the AMSA Meat Lexicon and this issue of *Animal Frontiers* is to provide the framework by which we can discuss meat. Even a casual perusal of popular and social media makes it clear that meat is controversial in terms of its effects on health and the environment. Meat is also wildly popular and enjoyed by the majority of people in the world. If we, as scientists, policymakers, and consumers are to solve the problems facing us, we have to start from a place of shared understanding. One way to foster that understanding, in a very fundamental way, is to define what we mean when we say “meat.” From there, the rest of the conversation will hopefully proceed just a little more smoothly.

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## About the Author



**Anna Dilger**, Ph.D., earned her B.S. and M.S. at Purdue University and her Ph.D. at the University of Illinois where she is currently an associate professor in the Department of Animal Sciences. The focus of her research is in muscle biology, especially the mechanisms regarding increased animal growth, efficiency, and their effects on meat quality. Her work relates the use of performance-enhancing technologies on growth performance of livestock to the quality and quantity of meat produced from those animals including the shelf-life

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