

World's first fully-automated beef boning program is a step closer

The world's first fully-automated beef boning program is a step closer, with a major pre-production demonstration of a striploin cutting module about to kick off at JBS Australia's Brooklyn, Victoria facility as part of the LEAP4Beef program.

LEAP4Beef follows the success of an earlier project to automate lamb cutting and seeks to apply the learnings from that work to the beef processing sector. Once fully developed and integrated, the system will unlock large-scale, high throughput and sophisticated automation to maximise cutting accuracy and yield.

Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC) CEO, Chris Taylor, said the prototype module at JBS Australia would focus on striploin-rack-chine removal. It will use a simple sensing approach to refine the mechanical elements of the module before an advanced sensing system is implemented to attain the full benefit of accurate automated cutting.

"This technology has the aim of improving workplace health and safety, increasing processing efficiency and enhancing profitability," Mr Taylor said. "The prototype is an important step in making this technology accessible for the industry. "We are also planning an industry demonstration event where we will seek feedback and assess interest from processors who might like to participate in hosting future stages of the project."

The program is a collaboration between the AMPC, Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and Scott Automation and Robotics in partnership with JBS Australia. It follows the development of several pre-prototypes by Scott as part of a recent MLA Donor Company project in partnership with Teys Australia. That work demonstrated an impressive \$29/head benefit from LEAP4Beef, delivering up to \$10M per annum return for a high throughput beef processor alongside significant labour savings and workplace health and safety benefits.

Prior projects and industry consultation have shown that a modular deboning approach, similar to the lamb LEAP automation system, could deliver high return on investment from yield recovery, labour efficiency, safety and quality, plus benefits such as throughput efficiency, hygiene and reduced reliance on skilled labour.

Mr Taylor explained that processing facilities could invest in the technology in a modular way, allowing them to start with the highest return modules and add further modules sequentially. MLA Managing Director, Jason Strong, said the project represents the next steps to help industry improve safety, streamline boning operations and improve yield and profitability.

“Australian processing is among the most expensive in the world, and automating the beef boning process would reduce per head operating costs and increase boning room yield efficiency, for the benefit of the entire Australian red meat supply chain,” Mr Strong said. “It is another example of the Australian red meat industry leading the world with technology and innovation, and also showing the strong collaboration in R&D between MLA and AMPC.”

Scott Technology CEO John Kippenberger said, “The Australian beef market will be the first to benefit from this new technology and local processor feedback is very important at each stage of the project. We also know that there is global application and demand for this type of beef cutting automation and we’re delighted to once again be part of a team bringing world-class tech to the industry.”

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