The Effects of Immunocastration on Meat Quality and Sensory Properties of Pork Bellies

Jong-Youn Jeong¹, Ji-Hun Choi², Yun-Sang Choi², Doo-Jeong Han, Hack-Youn Kim, Mi-Ai Lee³, Duk-Hun Lee⁴, and Cheon-Jei Kim*

Department of Food Science and Biotechnology of Animal Resources, Konkuk University, Seoul 143-701, Korea
¹Department of Animal Science, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, United States
²Research Institute for Meat Science and Culture, Konkuk University, Seoul 143-701, Korea
³World Institute of Kimchi, An annex of Korea Food Research Institute, Seongnam 463-746, Korea
⁴Pfizer Animal Health Korea, Seoul 135-784, Korea

Abstract

This study was conducted to assess meat quality and sensory properties of pork bellies from immunocastrated males (IC) compared to meat from surgically castrated males (SC), intact males (IM), and females (FE). Pork bellies from IC had significantly higher pH values than meat from either SC or FE. Pork bellies from IC showed lower CIE L* values than those from SC, but were redder (higher CIE a* values) than meat from SC or FE. However, no differences in visual color were observed between pork bellies from IC and SC pigs using National Pork Producer Council scales. Water holding capacity was higher in SC and FE than that in IC. IC showed no significant difference in cooking loss and shear force values compared with those of SC. Both SC and IC had improved fat content when compared to that in IM, and IC meat showed a similar fat content to that of FE. Pork bellies from IC showed higher ratings for all visual evaluation traits than those of SC and were the same as meat from FE. Boar odor was not significantly different among the treatments. IC was rated similar to SC for taste, tenderness, and overall acceptability.

Key words: pork belly, immunocastration, meat quality, sensory property

Introduction

Meat from some boars can have an offensive smell and taste, commonly known as boar taint. Boar taint is a sensory defect of pork coming mainly from entire males. It is considered to be mainly due to two compounds, skatole and androstenone (Bonneau et al., 1993). Since the consumers demand pork that is free of distinct boar taint, traditionally, the surgical castration of male piglets is the common practice to avoid boar taint. (Andresen et al., 1993). However, castration results in significant reductions in growth performance and excess deposition of fat (Berg et al., 1993; Bonneau et al., 1993). Furthermore, there are significant animal welfare concerns with surgical castration (Cambell and Taverner, 1984; Thun et al., 2006). Surgical castration may result in regulations or barriers on world’s meat trading. As a more welfare-friendly alternative to surgical castration, immunization against gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) has been used in various animals to suppress testicular function and avoid boar taint (Bonneau and Enright, 1995; Bonneau et al., 1994; D’Souza et al., 2000; Thun et al., 2006). Moreover, this new practice is 99% and 100% effective in lowering skatole and androstenone, respectively (Dunshea et al., 2005). In addition, the new approach has been approved for use in 55 countries around the world including Korea, Japan, Australia, and Brazil, and its use has recently approved in 2009 in the EU (European Medicines Agency, 2010; Gispert et al., 2010; Pfizer Animal Health, 2010).

Many studies have demonstrated that pork from boars vaccinated to control boar taint was of the same quality as pork from female or surgically castrated pigs (Font i Furnols et al., 2008; Jeong et al., 2008; Pauly et al., 2009, 2010). In addition, immunocastration to boars can improve meat quality as well as daily growth and feed efficiency of boars (Dikeman, 2007; Jaros et al., 2005).
Recent studies have indicated that there was no difference in meat quality between the immunocastrates and females, entire males, or surgical castrates, and immunocastration produced an acceptable pork to consumers and was indistinguishable from pork from surgical castrates or females (Font i Furnols et al., 2008; Gispert et al., 2010).

In Korea, pork belly is the most popular part of the pig, accounting for 23.9% of total pork meat consumption. Large amounts of pork meat are imported and consumed up to approximately 25% of total pork meat consumption in year (Korea Meat Trade Association, 2010). Thus, understanding the eating qualities of pork bellies is a very important component of improving Korean pork’s competitiveness. In addition, eliminating the boar taint is the critical issue to improve eating qualities of pork belly meat, because the boar taint and its degree of consumer dissatisfaction depends on androstenone and skatole levels in fat tissues (Bañón et al., 2004; Matthews et al., 2000) and further pork bellies have greater fat contents rather than other parts. However, there is very little information concerning the meat quality and the sensory attributes including the boar taint in pork bellies from immunocastrated males and other pigs.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the meat quality and the sensory properties of pork bellies from immunocastrated pigs compared with surgically castrated, entire, and female pigs slaughtered at the same age.

Materials and Methods

Raw material preparation

A total of eighty Large White × Duroc crossbreed pigs (twenty of each treatment) from the same farm were randomly selected from 520 pigs (130 pigs/treatment) to supply pork bellies for this study. The pigs were allocated to the four experimental groups as followings: entire males (EM), males surgically castrated at 5 d of age (SC), males vaccinated against boar taint using Improvac® (IC), and females (FE). The animals were reared in controlled conditions at a commercial farm in Yang-Ju (Northern Kyonggi-Do, Korea) and piglets were notched in their ear with a unique identification number. Pigs were grouped into pens (13 pigs/pen, each 10 pens) with the same treatment and were fed the same diet throughout the study period. Pigs had ad libitum access to a standard starter diet formulation. The feeds were provided from a commercial feeding company (Rainbow Feeding Co., Ltd.) by stage of growth. Improvac® treatment (Improvac®, Pfizer Animal Health Korea, Korea) was administered subcutaneously behind the ear as 2 mL doses; first dose at about 9 wk and the second dose at about 20 wk of age (approximately 6 wk prior to the slaughter). Pigs were slaughtered on the same day at 26 wk of age. Eighty pigs were processed using standard commercial procedures (stunning, exsanguination, scalding, dehairing, and evisceration) and the carcasses were split into left and right sides in controlled conditions at a commercial abattoir (Korea). Approximately at 24 h postmortem after slaughtering and chilling, pork bellies (5th ribs to 9th ribs, each 1.5-2.0 kg) were removed from left side of each carcass (80 carcasses), vacuum-packaged, and transported to the Meat Science Laboratory, Konkuk University, Korea. Pork samples were kept at 4°C until the test. The area between the 5th though 7th ribs of pork bellies was used to determine meat quality traits at 48 h post-mortem (Fig. 1). Samples from between the 7th to 9th areas were also used for visual and sensory evaluations.

pH, fat content, and water holding capacity (WHC)

To minimize the variations due to the proportion of fat/lean meat in belly parts, the samples were removed from 5th and 7th ribs of pork bellies at 48 h postmortem (Fig. 1), individually cut, and mixed with blender (Model 963009, Hermann Scharfen GmbH & Co., Germany) for the determination of pH, fat content, and WHC. A mixed sample (5 g) was homogenized with 20 mL of distilled water for 60 s in an Ultra-Turrax (Model T-25, Janken and Kunkel, Germany). The pH values of raw bellies were measured in duplicate with a pH meter (Model 340, Mettler-Toledo GmbH, Switzerland). The fat content was

![Fig. 1. Diagram of sampling locations for evaluating the meat quality and sensory properties of pork bellies. Each number indicates the locations used for the analyses in pork belly: 1. Instrumental color, visual color, cooking loss, shear force; 2. pH value, fat content, water holding capacity; 3. Visual and sensory evaluations.](image-url)
chemically determined in duplicate on samples using a solvent extraction system (AOAC, 1997; Model Avanti 2050 Auto System, Foss Tecator AB, Sweden). WHC was measured following a modification of the procedure of Grau and Hamm (1953). Briefly, a 300 mg sample was placed on a filter-press device and compressed for 3 min. WHC was calculated as a ratio of the pressed meat area to the total area.

**Instrumental (CIE L*a*b*) and visual color**

Objective color readings were determined in duplicate on a freshly cut belly surface adjacent to between the 5th and 7th ribs at 48 h postmortem. The samples were placed on a styrofoam tray and overwrapped with oxygen permeable film. After a 30 min bloom at room temperature, the color was determined using a colorimeter (CR 210, Minolta Camera Co., Ltd., Japan; 50 mm aperture, illuminant C). The colorimeter was standardized against a white calibration plate (CIE L* 97.83, a* – 0.43, b* 1.98), through the corresponding film. Also subjective measurements of visual color score were evaluated using the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC, 1999): 1 = pale pinkish gray to white, 2 = grayish pink, 3 = reddish pink, 4 = dark reddish pink, 5 = purplish red, and 6 = dark purplish red.

**Cooking loss and shear force determination**

The samples (5 pieces each from twenty samples per treatment) were randomly cooked to an endpoint temperature of 75°C on electric grills (Model CG20-1, Hobart Corp., USA) preheated to 180°C. The temperature of samples during cooking was monitored using an infrared thermometer (Model 66, Fluke Corporation, USA). Each piece of sample (approximate 7 mm thickness, about 23 g) was placed on the grill and cooked on the first side for 2 min and the second side for 2 min, and then turned every min until the endpoint temperature reached to 75°C. Cooked bellies were cooled at room temperature for 30 min and then cooking loss was measured.

After cooling for 1 h, each section of cooked bellies was compressed with a plate-type blade set attached to a Texture Analyzer (Model TA-XT2i, Stable Micro System Ltd., UK). Test speed was set at 2 mm/s. Shear force (N) was calculated as a maximum force to shear the samples.

**Visual and sensory evaluations**

A trained sensory panel was used for both visual and sensory evaluations. Initially 20 panelists began the screening procedure. Training was given over a 4 wk period (8 sessions) in order to increase the sensitivity of the panel to androstenone (A8008, Sigma-Aldrich Corp., USA) and skatole (W301906, Sigma-Aldrich Corp., USA). After training, 12 panelists were selected, based on sensitivity to boar taint. Panelists were seated at round tables with 4 people per table and screens blocked between panelists. An electric hot-plate was centered in the middle of each table. Panelists were briefed thoroughly on the questionnaires and test methodology prior to commencement and were only informed that they would taste different pork products; they were not informed of the treatments. Before cooking, 4 pieces of raw belly were presented in the center of each table. The raw belly was scored for color, fat/meat structure, and overall preference using a 10-point category scale (10 = extremely desirable and 1 = extremely undesirable).

Immediately after evaluation of the raw meat, the samples were cooked on the electric grill at 180°C to an endpoint temperature of 75°C. Only samples from the same treatment were cooked at the same time so as to avoid cross contamination. The samples were provided in a coded manner and presented in a random manner. The hot plates were washed in warm water and unsalted crackers and water also was provided between each cooking session. Panel sessions were held on 4 d with a total of 80 samples being evaluated by each panelist (20 samples/treatment). A 10-point category scale was used for rating the different characteristics of the treatments. The cooked belly slices were assessed for aroma (boar odor), taste, tenderness, juiciness, and overall acceptability. Aroma was scored as follows: 10 = extremely intense and 1 = extremely bland. Taste and overall acceptability were scored on follows: 10 = extremely acceptable and 1 = extremely unacceptable. Tenderness and juiciness were scored on follows: 10 = extremely tender, extremely juicy; 1 = extremely tough, extremely dry.

**Statistical analysis**

Data for all variables of meat quality attributes were statistically analyzed using the General Linear Models (GLM) of SAS (2002) with treatment groups (SC, IC, EM, and FE) as the main effect. If significance was determined (p<0.05) in the model, dependent variable means were separated using Turkey’s multiple range test of SAS (2002). Both visual and sensory evaluations data were pooled for across panelists and were analyzed as previously described.
Results and Discussion

Effects on meat qualities

The pH values

The pork sample from different treatments showed pH values ranging between 5.79-5.95 (Table 1). Pork bellies from IC had higher pH values (p<0.05) than meat from SC and FE, but showed no significant difference from EM meat. When Kim et al. (2007) compared pork loins from entire boars, surgical castrates, and immunocastrates, they did not find significant differences in pH values, which is inconsistent with our results. Pauly et al. (2009) also found that pH values of pork loins did not differ among surgical castrates, entire male pigs, and immunocastrates. This disagreement between previous studies reported and present study may be due to differences in pork parts examined, because loin samples obtained from the same animals in the current study were not significantly different in pH values among the four treatments (Jeong et al., 2008). Nevertheless, with the exception of IC, pH values of SC belly meat in this study were similar (p>0.05) to those of EM or FE. These findings are similar to those of previous researches (Bañón et al., 2004; Sather et al., 1999).

Instrumental (CIE L*a*b*) and visual color

Pork bellies from SC had higher (p<0.05) CIE L* values (lightness) than the other treatments (IC, EM, and FE) which are similar (p>0.05) to one another (Table 1). This result is similar to that of Silveira et al. (2008) who found significantly higher CIE L* values in surgically castrated males than in immunologically castrated pigs. In the case of CIE a*, meat from IC was redder (higher CIE a* values; p<0.05) than meat from SC or FE, but not significantly different from EM meat (Table 1). However, no significant differences in CIE a* values were observed for SC, EM, and FE. Both castration treatments (SC and IC) showed more yellow color (higher CIE b* values) compared to EM and FE, but there were no significant differences in CIE b* values between pork meat from SC and IC, or EM and FE (Table 1).

When surface color of pork bellies was subjectively made by NPPC scales, visual color scores were the highest value (p<0.05) in FE (3.67), and was not significantly different among SC (3.41), IC (3.38), and EM (3.28) (Table 1). Although significant, differences in the scores ranging from 3.28 to 3.67 were minimal. Thus, pork bellies obtained for this study maintained a normal color (between reddish pink and dark reddish pink) regardless of castration practices or gender of animals.

Water holding capacity (WHC)

The WHC was lower (p<0.05) in samples from IC than those from SC and FE, but not different (p>0.05) between IC and EM samples (Table 1). Pork bellies from SC, EM, and FE had a similar WHC (p>0.05) as was reported by D’Souza and Mullan (2003) for pork loins from surgically castrated males and females. Jeong et al. (2008) found no significant differences in WHC for loin meat from the same four treatments as in the present study. This result is partially in accordance with the present study, although a decrease in WHC of IC meat was observed in our results. However, D’Souza et al. (2000) found that

Table 1. The meat quality characteristics of pork bellies from immunocastrated males compared with surgically castrated males, entire males, and females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>IC</th>
<th>EM</th>
<th>FE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td>5.79±0.03</td>
<td>5.95±0.04</td>
<td>5.83±0.03</td>
<td>5.79±0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIE L*</td>
<td>61.27±0.51</td>
<td>58.43±0.50</td>
<td>56.74±0.42</td>
<td>57.49±0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIE a*</td>
<td>12.98±0.27</td>
<td>14.56±0.30</td>
<td>13.77±0.15</td>
<td>13.20±0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIE b*</td>
<td>4.60±0.08</td>
<td>4.54±0.09</td>
<td>3.39±0.10</td>
<td>3.50±0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual color (NPPC)</td>
<td>3.41±0.07</td>
<td>3.38±0.06</td>
<td>3.28±0.06</td>
<td>3.67±0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water holding capacity (%)</td>
<td>36.14±0.61</td>
<td>32.82±0.96</td>
<td>34.00±0.80</td>
<td>36.25±1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking loss (%)</td>
<td>31.26±0.32</td>
<td>31.01±0.35</td>
<td>30.74±0.48</td>
<td>32.64±0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shear force (N)</td>
<td>90.91±1.54</td>
<td>82.79±2.26</td>
<td>84.95±2.64</td>
<td>87.88±2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat content (%)</td>
<td>21.07±0.47</td>
<td>18.25±0.42</td>
<td>15.78±0.59</td>
<td>18.66±0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All values are mean±SE.  
1SC: surgically castrated males, IC: immunocastrated males, EM: entire males, FE: females 
2NPPC: National Pork Producers Council 
A-C Means within a row with unlike superscript letters are significantly different (p<0.05).
pork loins from Improvac vaccinated (immunocastrated) male pigs and entire males exhibited a higher WHC compared to meat from female pigs.

Cooking loss
Cooking loss ranged from 30.74 to 32.64% and bellies from SC had similar ($p>0.05$) cooking loss to meat from IC, EM, or FE (Table 1). Kim et al. (2007) and Pauly et al. (2009) found that cooking loss did not significantly differ among loins from the castrates, immunocastrated boars, and entire males, in accordance with the present results. However, meat from IC and EM showed a lower ($p<0.05$) cooking loss than meat from FE. Eikelenboom and Hoving-Bolink (1993) reported samples from gilts having greater cooking losses than the meat from surgical castrates, but no differences ($p>0.05$) in cooking loss between SC and FE were found in the current study.

Shear force value
The shear force of pork bellies may depend on the structures or ratio of the meat tissue and the fat layer. Thus, to minimize variation between the samples, in the present experiment, shear force was measured on 100 pieces (5 pieces from each of 20 samples) per treatment using a plate-type blade set. Shear force values of pork bellies were similar ($p>0.05$) among treatments (SC, IC, EM, and FE) (Table 1). This agrees with work done by Kim et al. (2007), who found no significant differences in shear force values among loin meat from entire boars, surgical castrates, and immunocastrates. Our results demonstrated that immunocastration by vaccination to boars caused a similar on shear force values of pork bellies when compared against surgical castrates under condition tested in this study.

Fat content
SC was the fattest (21.07%) in the belly and EM was the leanest (15.78%), while IC (18.25%) and FE (18.66%) were intermediate ($p<0.05$) (Table 1). Similarly, Park et al. (2009) reported that belly meat from barrows (surgically castrated boars) had a great fat content than gilts (females). Gispert et al. (2010) reported that castrated males were the fattest and entire males the leanest in the ham area, while immunocastrated males and females were in between. Jeremiah et al. (1999) also found that barrows (castrated boars) showed a higher marbling score than gilts (females) or entire boars. Comparing immunocastration with surgical castration, the yield of lean meat was significantly lower in immunocastrates than surgical castrates (Jaros et al., 2005), which is similar to our results. In addition, D’Souza et al. (2000) and Pauly et al. (2009) have demonstrated that immunocastrated boars showed a higher marbling score than entire males.

### Effects on visual and sensory evaluations

#### Visual evaluations
Visual evaluations were made for color, fat/meat structure, and overall preference before cooking pork bellies, and the results are presented in Table 2. The color of IC and FE samples was rated higher scores ($p<0.05$) than that of SC but not significantly different from that of EM meat which was similar to that of SC meat. These results were similar to the trends in CIE $a^*$ values in this study. It seems likely that redness of pork bellies is considered to be acceptable indicator and redder bellies from IC with respect to meat from SC were probably preferred by Korean panelists tested in present study. Since the ratio between fat and meat within pork bellies is not prescribed by regulations or any indexes, it may depend on preferences of individuals from their habits, experiences for eating meat, or other factors. Nevertheless, fat/meat structure was rated the highest scores in bellies from IC and FE ($p<0.05$), but lowest in samples from SC and EM ($p<0.05$). The overall preference of IC bellies was higher than that of SC and EM meat ($p<0.05$) but not signifi-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>IC</th>
<th>EM</th>
<th>FE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>7.76±0.06$^a$</td>
<td>8.07±0.05$^A$</td>
<td>7.88±0.05$^{AB}$</td>
<td>8.01±0.06$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat/meat structure</td>
<td>7.58±0.07$^a$</td>
<td>8.03±0.06$^A$</td>
<td>7.78±0.06$^A$</td>
<td>8.01±0.06$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall preference</td>
<td>7.69±0.06$^c$</td>
<td>8.11±0.05$^A$</td>
<td>7.83±0.05$^{AC}$</td>
<td>8.01±0.06$^{AB}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All values are mean±SE.

$^1$Scores based on 10-point scale, where 10= extremely desirable and 1= extremely undesirable

$^2$SC: surgically castrated males, IC: immunocastrated males, EM: entire males, FE: females

$^A$-$^C$ Means within a row with unlike superscript letters are significantly different ($p<0.05$).
sently different ($p>0.05$) from FE samples. In addition, SC showed a lower overall preference ($p<0.05$) than FE but was not significantly different from EM. When summarizing visual evaluations results, IC had higher ratings ($p<0.05$) than SC in color, fat/meat structure and overall preference, and were similar ($p>0.05$) to FE for all attributes evaluated, which could positively affect decisions for purchasing pork bellies by consumers.

Sensory evaluations

Comparison on sensory properties of cooked pork bellies between immunocastrates, surgical castrates, entire males, and females is shown in Table 3. The mean scores of aroma (boar odor) were lower than 3.5, and no significant difference was observed among the treatments (SC, IC, EM, and FE). Similar results were reported in other consumer studies for meat from entire males, castrated males, and females (Cowan and Joseph, 1981; Nold et al., 1997; Rhodes, 1971). Interestingly, IC has the same effect on boar odor with respect to SC in these tested conditions. Recently reported studies indicated that there were no differences in boar odor when surgical castrates and immunocastrates were compared (Font i Furnols et al., 2008; Jeong et al., 2008; Pauly et al., 2010). The higher correlation between boar taint and both androstenone and skatole content has been noted by many researchers (Andressen et al., 1993; Berg et al., 1993; Bonneau et al., 1993; Desmoulin et al., 1982; Font i Furnols et al., 2009; Froystein et al., 1993, 1980; Lundstrom et al., 1988). It has been demonstrated that immunization against gonadotrophin-releasing factor (GnRF) to boars can contribute to an effective control of boar taint in pork meat (Dunshea et al., 2001; Font i Furnols et al., 2008, 2009; Jaros et al., 2005; McCauley et al., 2003). Moreover, Pauly et al. (2009) noted that the androstenone, skatole, and indole concentrations in the adipose tissue of all immunocastrated pigs were clearly below the sensory thresholds. Our results confirmed that boar odor in belly meat could be reduced by immunocastration as well as surgical castration of boars. However, panelists participated in sensory evaluations could not differentiate among the treatments for boar odor, even for meat from entire males, although they were trained with androstenone and skatole for boar odor. Repeated exposure to both compounds tends to increase sensitivity to these compounds (Wysocki and Beauchamp, 1984). The perception of individual humans to boar odor varies widely by consumer gender (Griffiths and Patterson, 1970; Matthews et al., 2000; Wysocki and Beauchamp, 1984), habitual frequency (Babol and Squires, 1995; Matthews et al., 2000), and the variety of culinary habits between countries (Bonneau et al., 2000; Bonneau and Lebret, 2010; Matthews et al., 2000).

Table 3. Sensory properties$^1$ of cooked pork bellies from immunocastrated males compared with surgically castrated males, entire males, and females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>IC</th>
<th>EM</th>
<th>FE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aroma (boar odor)</td>
<td>2.58±0.10</td>
<td>3.28±0.10</td>
<td>3.05±0.10</td>
<td>2.56±0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>7.78±0.06</td>
<td>7.58±0.06</td>
<td>7.62±0.06</td>
<td>7.73±0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenderness</td>
<td>7.87±0.05$^A$</td>
<td>7.67±0.06$^{AB}$</td>
<td>7.56±0.06$^B$</td>
<td>7.77±0.06$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juiciness</td>
<td>8.05±0.05$^A$</td>
<td>7.82±0.05$^B$</td>
<td>7.78±0.05$^B$</td>
<td>7.81±0.05$^B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall acceptability</td>
<td>7.78±0.06$^A$</td>
<td>7.55±0.07$^{AB}$</td>
<td>7.52±0.07$^B$</td>
<td>7.74±0.07$^{AB}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All values are mean±SE.

$^1$Scores based on 10-point scale, where 10 = extremely intense and 1 = extremely bland for aroma (boar odor), 10 = extremely acceptable and 1 = extremely unacceptable for taste and overall acceptability, 10 = extremely tender, extremely juicy; 1 = extremely tough, extremely dry for tenderness and juiciness.

$^2$SC, surgically castrated males; IC, immunocastrated males; EM, entire males; FE, females

$^{AB}$Means within a row with unlike superscript letters are significantly different ($p<0.05$).
acceptability of bellies from SC may be related to their fat content. Related to fat content, Bañón et al. (2004) found that the meat of castrates was juicier and more tender than meat from entire males when there were significant differences in the amount of intramuscular fat. It is possible that lower intramuscular fat in entire male pigs, related to the reduced carcass fatness, may be responsible for the lower tenderness and juiciness (Bonneau and Lebret, 2010).

In this study, bellies from IC did not show any significant differences from the other treatments (SC, EM, and FE) for overall acceptability, while SC had higher scores compared to EM. These results are similar to those of Bañón et al. (2004), who found that pork loin acceptance was better in surgical castrates than in entire males. Similarly, D’Souza and Mullan (2003) reported that pork from entire males was significantly less acceptable when judged by a consumer panel compared with pork from the surgically and immunologically castrated male pigs. Recently, Gispert et al. (2010) have indicated that surgically and immunologically castrated males among the same four treatments as in the present study were characterized by relatively higher levels of fat and high acceptability of odor and taste by consumer. Therefore, even though there was no difference in boar odor and taste in our results, relatively less fat levels in bellies from entire male pigs could be responsible for dissatisfaction of meat (Bañón et al., 2004; D’Souza and Mullan, 2003).

In conclusion, pork bellies from IC were similar to meat from SC in visual color, cooking loss, and shear force. Also, visual properties of raw bellies showed higher ratings IC than SC and EM. In addition, no difference was observed in boar odor among the treatments and meat from IC and FE were judged to be of the same sensory properties. Therefore, these results suggest that immunocastration could serve as effective and suitable alternatives to avoid surgical castration and produce more efficient boars free of animal welfare issues with no negative effects on pork quality.

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