



Effect of the Dorper breed on the performance, carcass and meat traits of lambs bred from Santa Inês sheep

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to evaluate the effect of the Dorper breed on the growth performance, feed efficiency, carcass and meat traits when crossbred with Santa Inês sheep raised under an intensive production system in the northeastern region of Brazil. Twenty-four lambs were used in this trial under a fully randomized design. The lambs were housed and creep fed until weaning at 62 days of age. After weaning, they were sent to a feedlot for finishing with a high-energy diet until slaughter, which occurred when the lambs attained a 3 mm thickness of subcutaneous fat. The Dorper crossbred lambs exhibited a higher daily gain (223.8 g/day) than the Santa Inês pure lambs (168.1 g/day) and attained the slaughter fat thickness (132 days) more quickly. Significant differences were observed between the crosses and the Santa Inês lambs in terms of the carcass weight, rib eye area, carcass and leg compactness indexes, weight and dressing of commercial cuts and the muscle:bone ratio. According to the results obtained under the described experimental conditions, at the same maturity level, the growth performance, the age at slaughter and the main carcass characteristics were conclusively improved by crossbreeding of the Santa Inês ewes with the Dorper rams, making the use of local sheep breeds possible, to efficiently meet the needs of the domestic market.

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1. Introduction

With a herd of 14.1 million heads (IBGE, 2009), the sheep meat industry has been developing significantly in all regions of Brazil, and the expansion of the domestic market is supported by the association between high demand and limited supply. However, the large urban centers currently demand high-quality cuts provided from early maturity lambs from producers who are able to provide carcasses with good conformation and yield, adequate fatness and high lean meat percentage.

Generally, local or indigenous sheep breeds exhibit a lower growth rate and feed efficiency, as well as poorer carcass traits and yield (Canto et al., 2009; Cartaxo et al., 2011; Deng et al., 2012; Tsegay et al., 2013). Such characteristics result in less-efficient production systems and do not address the needs of the sheep industry. Consequently, the use of techniques such as creep feeding, feedlot

finishing and crossbreeding with exotic meat breeds is necessary to efficiently produce high-standard lambs in order to satisfy market requirements.

The Santa Inês is actually the largest local sheep breed population in Brazil and has an 51% share on the flocks in northeastern Brazil (Costa et al., 2007), where it is commonly used in crossbreeding with the Dorper breed to produce fast-growing, meaty lambs (Souza et al., 2013; Gallo et al., 2014; Galvani et al., 2014).

The Santa Inês breed has high adaptability to tropical ecosystems (Bezerra et al., 2011) and it is the closest local sheep breed to commercial exotic breeds as Suffolk (Carneiro et al., 2010; McManus et al., 2010) but it exhibits inferior characteristics about some key aspects for the production of meat such as finishing precocity and muscularity (Cartaxo et al., 2011).

The use of Dorper as the terminal sire breed has been studied recently under several conditions in various countries in the Americas (Canto et al., 2009; Osorio-Avalos et al., 2012; Shackelford et al., 2012; Yeaman et al., 2013), Africa (Kariuki et al., 2010; Tsegay et al., 2013, 2014) and Asia (Deng et al., 2012), and increasingly is one of the more successful exotic sheep breeds in Brazil.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the effect of the use of increasing levels of the Dorper genotype on growth performance,

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Table 1

Ingredients and chemical composition of the finishing ration, % dry matter.

Ingredients	
Elephant grass hay (<i>Pennisetum purpureum</i>)	25.0
Ground corn	51.0
Soybean meal	22.1
Calcitic lime	1.1
Ammonium chloride	0.5
Minerals	0.3 ^a
Chemical composition	
Dry matter	89.9
Crude protein	18.6
Ether extract	3.3
Ash	6.7
Neutral detergent fiber	32.8
Acid detergent fiber	18.3

^a Mineral mixed: Na 13.2%, Ca 8.2%, P 6%, S 1.17%, Fe 700 ppm, Zn 2.600 ppm, Mn 1.200 ppm, F 600 ppm, Cu 350 ppm, Mo 180 ppm, I 50 ppm, Co 30 ppm, Cr 11.7 ppm, Se 15 ppm.

feed efficiency and carcass and meat traits of lambs produced from Santa Inês ewes and raised in an intensive production system.

2. Materials and methods

The experiment was performed at the "Valley of Curu" Experimental Farm, Department of Animal Science and Department of Food Technology of the Federal University of Ceará, which has campuses in the cities of Pentecoste and Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil.

The "Valley of Curu" Experimental Farm is located in Pentecoste city to 3°47' latitude south and 39°16' longitude west Gr. The climate type is BSw, h, using Köppen classification, with the rainy season extending from January to June and a dry season which runs from July to December. The historic average for annual rainfall is 806 mm presenting average temperature of 27.3 °C with 54.8% of annual relative humidity. The sheep flock has about 150 Santa Inês and ½ Dorper × Santa Inês ewes.

Eight lambs (four males and four females) from each Santa Inês (SI), ½ Dorper × Santa Inês (½ DO × SI) and ¾ Dorper × Santa Inês (¾ DO × SI) genetic group, born and reared as singles, and chosen randomly, were used in this study. From the third week after birth to weaning at 62 days of age (rearing phase), the lambs were maintained under the same management in a creep feeding system under confinement and with overnight suckling. After weaning, during the feedlot finishing phase, the lambs were housed in shaded brickwork individual pens (1.5 × 0.7 m) equipped with feeders and water suppliers, and fed rations (Table 1) prepared in accordance with the NRC (2007). The rations were provided daily *ad libitum* as a total mixed ration, which was delivered as two meals, the first at 0900 h and the second at 1700 h. The food supply was adjusted daily to yield 10% in remains in relative to the natural matter, which was weighed to determine the dry matter intake.

For calculation of the daily gain, the lambs were weighed every 14 days from weaning until the end of the experiment. The weights were taken after 16 h fasting to minimize error.

The lambs were slaughtered when they reached 3 mm of subcutaneous fat thickness (UC), as determined by ultrasound. The fat thickness was monitored and measured every 14 days using an SSD 500 V (Aloka®, Tokyo, Japan) ultrasound machine equipped with a 3.5 MHz linear array transducer (UST-5011-3.5, Aloka®, Tokyo, Japan) and stand-off pad. The measurements were assessed between the 12th and 13th thoracic vertebrae on the fat cover over the *longissimus thoracis et lumborum* muscle. The body condition score was also assessed using a scale of 1–5 with intervals of 0.25.

The lambs were slaughtered at a commercial abattoir, and the following data were recorded: body weight at slaughter (BWS), hot carcass weight (HCW), cold carcass weight (CCW), carcass

shrinkage (CS), hot dressing percentage (HDP) and cold dressing percentage (CDP). A conformation and fatness evaluation was also performed using a scale of 1–5 with intervals of 0.5.

To calculate the carcass and leg compactness indexes, the CCW/L and leg weight/F, respectively, the following measurements were taken: leg length (F; distance between the anterior edge of the *symphysis pubis* and the inner edge of the tarsal-metatarsal joint surface), and internal carcass length (L; distance between the anterior edge of the ischiopubic symphysis and the anterior edge of the first rib at its mean point).

The carcass was fabricated into commercial cuts (leg, loin, ribs, lower ribs, neck and shoulder). The cuts were weighed, vacuum packaged and stored under freezing. On the *longissimus thoracis et lumborum* muscle between the 12th and 13th thoracic vertebrae, measurements were taken of the maximum width (A), the maximum depth (B) and the subcutaneous fat thickness (C) over the B. The grade rule (GR) was measured in this moment. The rib eye area (REA) was assessed by using the formula: REA = (A/2 × B/2) × π.

The loin (*longissimus dorsi* muscle) was used for the meat chemical and physical analyses, whereas the leg was submitted to tissue dissection. For all analyses and for the tissue dissection, the cuts were thawed at 4 °C over 24 h prior to use. With the exception of the IMF (duplicate) and SF (quintuplicate), all analyses were performed in triplicate.

To determine the muscle:bone ratio and muscle dressing percentage (MDP), each left leg was physically dissected into muscle, fat, bone and other tissues (tendons, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels), and each component was weighed as described by Notter et al. (2004).

Minced and homogenized samples were used to evaluate the pH by use of a calibrated digital potentiometer TEC-05 (Tecnal Ltda.®, São Paulo, Brazil) with a glass electrode.

The loss of weight due to cooking (LWC) was determined according to a procedure described by Liu et al. (2004). The samples, composed of three loin slices of approximately 2.5 cm thickness, were weighed, vacuum packaged, and then cooked by immersing the individual bags in an 85 °C TE-057 water bath (Tecnal Ltda.®, São Paulo, Brazil) for 25 min. After cooking, the bags were cooled at room temperature before opening to drain the liquid. Then, the samples were weighed again, and the results were expressed as a percentage (g/100 g).

For water-holding capacity (WHC), the minced and homogenized samples were mixed in a NaCl (0.6 M) solution and centrifuged at 10.000 rpm for 15 min in a J2-21 centrifuge (Beckman Inc.®, California, USA) at approximately 4 °C (Miller and Groninger, 1976). The result was expressed in milliliters of water absorbed per 100 g of meat.

The texture was evaluated through the shearing force (SF), according to the methodology described by Duckett et al. (1998) but with fresh meat samples. Five 3.0 cm cylinders were removed parallel to the muscle fiber with a mechanical coring device. Cylinders were sheared using a TA.XTPlus Texture Analyzer (Stable Micro System Ltd.®, Surrey, UK) equipped with a Warner-Bratzler blade, operating at 20 cm/min. The peak shearing force was recorded, and the result was expressed in kilograms.

For the IMF analysis, loin slices were trimmed of all visible external fat and then minced and homogenized. Five-gram samples were taken and processed for moisture. Then, the samples were submitted to lipid extraction with hexane in a TE-044 Fat Determination System (Tecnal Ltda.®, São Paulo, Brazil), followed by evaporation of the solvent in an oven at 105 °C. The results were expressed as a percentage (g/100 g).

Instrumental color measurements of the meat were performed directly on the transversal surface of the *longissimus dorsi* muscle using a calibrated colorimeter CR410 (Minolta Co.®, Osaka, Japan). Random readings were taken at three different locations of each

Table 2

Means ± standard deviations of lamb performance from weaning to slaughter (finishing phase).

Variables	Genetic group			CV	Pr > F
	SI	½ DO × SI	¾ DO × SI		
IBW (kg)	13.2 ± 1.1 ^a	19.1 ± 1.6 ^b	21.85 ± 3.1 ^b	12.1	3.71e-07
FBW (kg)	30.3 ± 4.2 ^a	36.8 ± 3.4 ^b	36.7 ± 4.0 ^b	11.3	0.00397
Daily gain (g/day)	168.1 ± 35.1 ^a	219.0 ± 36.2 ^b	248.7 ± 42.5 ^b	17.9	0.00137
DMI (g/day)	878 ± 118 ^a	1116 ± 110 ^b	1089 ± 187 ^b	13.9	0.00572
DMI (% of body weight)	4.0 ± 0.3	3.9 ± 0.3	3.7 ± 0.5	10.6	0.337
Feed conversion	5.3 ± 0.6 ^a	5.1 ± 0.4 ^a	4.4 ± 0.5 ^b	10.5	0.00603
UC (mm)	3.1 ± 0.2	3.1 ± 0.6	3.3 ± 0.5	16.9	0.667
BCS (1 to 5)	2.8 ± 0.1	3.0 ± 0.2	3.0 ± 0.2	8.2	0.105
Slaughter age (days)	164.0 ± 3.5 ^a	143.2 ± 2.7 ^b	122.1 ± 2.7 ^c	2.1	<2e-16

IBW, initial body weight; FBW, final body weight; DMI, dry matter intake; UC, ultrasound subcutaneous fat thickness; BCS, body condition score; SI, Santa Inês; ½ DO × SI, ½ Dorper × Santa Inês; ¾ DO × SI, ¾ Dorper × Santa Inês; CV, coefficient of variation.

Means within the same row with different superscript differ ($P < 0.05$) significantly.

Table 3

Means ± standard deviations of the quantitative carcass characteristics.

Variables	Genetic group			CV	Pr > F
	SI	½ DO × SI	¾ DO × SI		
BWS (kg)	29.5 ± 4.1 ^a	35.9 ± 3.3 ^b	35.7 ± 4.0 ^b	11.4	0.00424
HCW (kg)	14.3 ± 1.7 ^a	18.1 ± 1.9 ^b	17.9 ± 2.6 ^b	12.8	0.00322
CCW (kg)	14.0 ± 1.3 ^a	17.8 ± 1.9 ^b	17.4 ± 2.7 ^b	13.3	0.0045
HDP (%)	48.8 ± 1.7	50.4 ± 1.7	50.0 ± 3.6	5.0	0.433
CDP (%)	47.7 ± 1.7	49.4 ± 1.7	48.7 ± 3.6	5.2	0.428
CS (%)	2.2 ± 0.5	2.0 ± 0.6	2.6 ± 0.8	28.5	0.222

BWS, body weight at slaughter; HCW, hot carcass weight; CCW, cold carcass weight; HDP, hot dressing percentage; CDP, cold dressing percentage; CS, carcass shrinkage; SI, Santa Inês; ½ DO × SI, ½ Dorper × Santa Inês; ¾ DO × SI, ¾ Dorper × Santa Inês; CV, coefficient of variation.

Means within the same row with different superscript differ ($P < 0.05$) significantly.

Table 4

Means ± standard deviations of the qualitative carcass characteristics.

Variables	Genetic group			CV	Pr > F
	SI	½ DO × SI	¾ DO × SI		
Conformation (1 to 5)	2.0 ± 0.2 ^a	2.9 ± 0.1 ^b	3.1 ± 0.3 ^b	10.2	9.88e-08
Fatness (1 to 5)	3.1 ± 0.2	3.2 ± 0.2	3.3 ± 0.4	9.5	0.767
REA (cm ²)	12.3 ± 2.2 ^a	16.6 ± 2.0 ^b	16.0 ± 3.0 ^b	16.6	0.00412
REA/100 kg BWS	41.8 ± 6.5	46.3 ± 3.6	45.1 ± 7.7	13.9	0.346
REA/100 kg CCW	87.8 ± 14.3	93.7 ± 7.0	92.3 ± 12.2	12.7	0.57
C (mm)	2.4 ± 0.2	2.5 ± 0.3	2.7 ± 0.2	11.1	0.184
C/100 kg BWS	8.5 ± 1.4	7.1 ± 0.8	7.7 ± 1.1	14.7	0.0737
C/100 kg CCW	17.8 ± 2.6 ^a	14.4 ± 1.7 ^b	15.9 ± 2.0 ^{ab}	13.3	0.0165
GR (mm)	10.9 ± 1.1	10.8 ± 1.8	11.8 ± 1.8	14.7	0.415
GR/100 kg BWS	37.5 ± 6.3 ^a	30.3 ± 5.2 ^b	33.1 ± 2.9 ^{ab}	14.9	0.0301
GR/100 kg CCW	78.5 ± 12.1 ^a	61.5 ± 10.9 ^b	68.1 ± 5.4 ^{ab}	14.3	0.00909
CCI (g/cm)	227.8 ± 19.2 ^a	281.6 ± 26.8 ^b	282.9 ± 37.5 ^b	10.9	0.00115
LCI (g/cm)	56.2 ± 4.5 ^a	76.8 ± 7.2 ^b	78.5 ± 9.3 ^b	10.4	5.53e-06

REA, rib eye area; REA/100 kg BWS, rib eye area/100 kg of body weight at slaughter; REA/100 kg CCW, rib eye area/100 kg of cold carcass weight; C, subcutaneous fat thickness; C/100 kg BWS, subcutaneous fat thickness/100 kg of body weight at slaughter; C/100 kg CCW, subcutaneous fat thickness/100 kg of cold carcass weight; GR, grade rule; GR/100 kg BWS, grade rule/100 kg of body weight at slaughter; GR/100 kg CCW, grade rule/100 kg of cold carcass weight; CCI, carcass compactness index; LCI, leg compactness index; SI, Santa Inês; ½ DO × SI, ½ Dorper × Santa Inês; ¾ DO × SI, ¾ Dorper × Santa Inês; CV, coefficient of variation.

Means within the same row with different superscript differ ($P < 0.05$) significantly.

Table 5

Means ± standard deviations of weight and dressing commercial cuts.

CommercialCuts	Genetic Group			CV	Pr > F
	SI kg (%)	½ DO × SI kg (%)	¾ DO × SI kg (%)		
Leg	2.3 ± 0.2 ^a (34.0 ± 1.1)	2.9 ± 0.3 ^b (33.8 ± 1.0)	2.9 ± 0.4 ^b (34.1 ± 1.3)	13.1 (3.5)	0.00212 (0.894)
Loin ^X	0.7 ± 0.1 ^a (10.3 ± 0.9)	0.9 ± 0.1 ^b (11.0 ± 0.7)	0.9 ± 0.2 ^b (11.2 ± 1.2)	15.6 (9.4)	0.00113 (0.251)
Shoulder	1.3 ± 0.1 (19.8 ± 0.5 ^a)	1.6 ± 0.2 (18.3 ± 0.9 ^b)	1.5 ± 0.2 (17.7 ± 0.7 ^b)	13.7 (4.1)	0.0583 (4.99e-05)
Neck ^Y	0.5 ± 0.1 (8.0 ± 0.6 ^a)	0.6 ± 0.1 (6.9 ± 0.8 ^{ab})	0.5 ± 0.1 (6.6 ± 1.0 ^b)	20.0 (12.1)	0.545 (0.0121)
Ribs	0.9 ± 0.1 ^a (14.3 ± 0.9 ^a)	1.4 ± 0.1 ^b (16.0 ± 1.0 ^b)	1.3 ± 0.3 ^b (15.8 ± 1.3 ^b)	16.9 (7.2)	0.000769 (0.0107)
Lower ribs ^X	0.9 ± 0.1 ^a (13.4 ± 0.9)	1.2 ± 0.2 ^b (13.8 ± 1.8)	1.2 ± 0.2 ^b (14.5 ± 0.9)	18.9 (9.3)	0.00954 (0.276)

SI, Santa Inês; ½ DO × SI, ½ Dorper × Santa Inês; ¾ DO × SI, ¾ Dorper × Santa Inês; CV, coefficient of variation.

Means within the same row with different superscript differ ($P < 0.05$) significantly.

Values in the parentheses correspond to the dressing commercial cuts.

Commercial cuts with superscript X showed a sex effect ($P < 0.05$) for dressing.

Commercial cuts with superscript Y had sex effect ($P < 0.05$) for weight and dressing.

Table 6Means \pm standard deviations of the meat and tissue characteristics.

Variables	Genetic group			CV	Pr > F
	SI	½ DO \times SI	¾ DO \times SI		
pH	5.45 \pm 0.0 ^a	5.52 \pm 0.0 ^b	5.51 \pm 0.0 ^b	0.8	0.0142
LWC (g/100 g)	40.1 \pm 1.7	38.3 \pm 1.4	38.3 \pm 1.6	4.0	0.05752
WHC (mL/100 g)	8.6 \pm 4.5 ^a	24.7 \pm 6.0 ^b	23.6 \pm 12.0 ^b	43.0	0.00104
Shear force (kgf/cm ²)	2.0 \pm 0.2 ^a	2.4 \pm 0.3 ^a	3.2 \pm 0.5 ^b	15.3	7.76e-06
IMF (%)	2.3 \pm 0.6	2.5 \pm 0.2	2.7 \pm 0.7	23.0	0.505
L*	45.4 \pm 1.9	42.7 \pm 3.4	44.0 \pm 1.8	5.6	0.118
a*	19.2 \pm 0.6	20.7 \pm 2.0	20.2 \pm 2.7	9.8	0.345
b*	7.7 \pm 1.4	8.4 \pm 1.7	8.5 \pm 1.5	19.2	0.548
M:B	2.8 \pm 0.2 ^a	3.3 \pm 0.2 ^b	3.2 \pm 0.2 ^b	7.9	0.00722
MDP (%)	72.6 \pm 1.6 ^a	75.1 \pm 1.3 ^b	75.0 \pm 1.6 ^b	2.1	0.00669

LWC, loss of weight for cooking; WHC, water-holding capacity; IMF, intramuscular fat; L*, lightness; a*, redness index; b*, yellowness index; M:B, muscle:bone ratio; MDP, muscle dressing percentage; SI, Santa Inês; ½ DO \times SI, ½ Dorper \times Santa Inês; ¾ DO \times SI, ¾ Dorper \times Santa Inês; CV, coefficient of variation.

Means within the same row with different superscript differ ($P < 0.05$) significantly.

sample. The three location readings were averaged, and the color for each sample was expressed in terms of CIE values for lightness (L*), redness (a*), and yellowness (b*).

Statistical analyses were performed using the R statistical package. The experimental design was fully randomized in a 3 \times 2 factorial with three genetic groups (SI, ½ DO \times SI and ¾ DO \times SI) and two sexes (male and female) with 8 lambs (4 males and 4 females) per genetic group. The effects of the genotype, sex and the genotype \times sex interaction were analyzed. The means were compared through the Tukey test at a level of 5% probability.

3. Results and discussion

No significant effect ($P > 0.05$) was observed for the interaction or sex for most variables, so the tables show only the results for the genotype. An effect of sex ($P < 0.05$) was observed for the dressing of some commercial cuts and is noted in the text.

The mean values of the IBW, FBW and daily gain are presented in Table 2. The average daily gain observed for both Dorper crosses was greater ($P < 0.05$) than for the SI lambs, but below the results from other studies using Dorper \times Santa Inês crossbred lambs under similar feeding conditions (Souza et al., 2013; Gallo et al., 2014; Galvani et al., 2014).

A significant difference in dry matter intake was found ($P < 0.05$) between the SI and Dorper genotypes, due the superior body weight of the ½ DO \times SI and ¾ DO \times SI lambs. Galvani et al., (2014) working with DO \times SI crosses with similar BWS reported values close to those found in this study. When comparing the DMI as the percentage of body weight, the differences among the three genetic groups were not significant ($P > 0.05$).

In turn, the feed conversion (Table 2) was better ($P < 0.05$) in the ¾ DO \times SI lambs, indicating that the conversion of foods into the body tissue becomes more efficient with the greater participation of genotypes specialized for meat production in the composition of the crossbred lamb.

As expected, the subcutaneous fat thickness (UC) determined by ultrasound and the body condition score (BCS) did not differ ($P > 0.05$) among the genetic groups because the lambs reached the same maturity level relative to the finishing degree.

However, the slaughter age (Table 2) was significantly ($P < 0.05$) different between the three genotypes, indicating that the ¾ DO \times SI lambs are earlier and the SI are later in subcutaneous adipose tissue deposition, with the ½ DO \times SI crosses remaining in an intermediate condition. Therefore, the Dorper breed reduced the feedlot finishing phase at 21 and 42 days for the ½ and ¾ DO \times SI lambs, respectively.

As a result of the greater ($P < 0.05$) BWS (Table 3) of the ½ DO \times SI and ¾ DO \times SI lambs, the HCW and the CCW were different

($P < 0.05$) and 25% superior for both Dorper genotypes and above the results presented by Gallo et al. (2014) for ½ DO \times SI lambs with the same BWS. In turn, the dressing percentages and carcass shrinkage were similar ($P > 0.05$) among the three genetic groups.

The use of the Dorper breed improved ($P < 0.05$) the carcass conformation score (Table 4) by 1.0 point and increased ($P < 0.05$) the size of the REA by about 30% in the crossbred lambs, as was expected by the differences in muscularity and carcass weight, respectively. However, when the rib eye area was estimated as a function of the BWS or CCW (REA/100 kg BWS, REA/100 kg CCW), no difference ($P > 0.05$) was observed among the three genetic groups, indicating that the lambs tested have the same amount of muscle per unit of body weight or cold carcass weight.

As previously confirmed by the UC, the subcutaneous fat thicknesses measured in the carcass (C) were similar ($P > 0.05$) among the three genetic groups, confirming that the lambs had the same degree of maturity at the time of slaughter. However, the SI genotype presented more ($P < 0.05$) fat than the crosses when the relation between the C and BWS (C/100 kg BWS) or the C and CCW (C/100 kg CCW) was considered, showing that the Santa Inês lambs had more fat per unit of weight and, possibly, that they could be slaughtered at a lower degree of finishing but with lighter BWS. The GR measurement showed similar behavior.

The carcass and leg compactness indexes (Table 4) were approximately 23% and 38% superior ($P < 0.05$) in the Dorper crossbred lambs, respectively, resulting in bulkier carcasses and legs and, consequently, in more attractive cuts for retailers and consumers.

Significant differences ($P < 0.05$) were found between the SI lambs and the Dorper crosses for most cut weights (Table 5), especially for cuts of higher commercial value, such as the leg, loin and ribs, indicating that the Dorper breed increased the tissue level on the lumbar and posterior portion of the carcass. Notably, cuts from the neck and shoulder did not show weight changes ($P > 0.05$) even with the higher cold carcass weight of the ½ and ¾ DO \times SI lambs. Ribs, loin and leg cuts were 50%, 28% and 26% heavier, respectively, in the Dorper crossbred lambs.

The dressing commercial cuts (Table 5) show that the Dorper breed decreased ($P < 0.05$) the share of the shoulder and neck while increasing ($P < 0.05$) the share of the ribs in the carcass. An effect ($P < 0.05$) of sex was observed in the loin ($P = 0.00897$), neck ($P = 0.000284$) and lower ribs ($P = 0.0226$), with the females presenting the higher values for loin and lower ribs.

The meat pH (Table 6) of the lambs used in this study was below 5.8 and within the prescribed values for quality meats (Savell et al., 2005). However, the Dorper crosses presented higher values ($P < 0.05$) than the SI lambs, which may be related to the presence of fast glycolytic muscle fibers determining the level of the glyco-

gen muscle stores and the post-mortem muscle glycogenolysis rate (Warner et al., 2010; Hopkins and Mortimer, 2014).

In general, studies have not shown significant differences among genetic groups for LWC and WHC (Abdullah et al., 2011; Cloete et al., 2012); however, in this work, the SI genotype was observed to have lower ($P < 0.05$) water-holding capacity than the crossbred lambs (Table 6), which might be related to the pH of the meat of the SI lambs whose value (5.45) is similar to the isoelectric point (pI) of the major proteins, especially myosin, which determine the higher losses of water of the myofibrillar space (Huff-Lonergan and Lonergan, 2005).

Although the meat of all three genetic groups show shear force values that indicate extremely tender meat—lower than 3.4 kgf/cm² (Shackelford et al., 1995; Rhee et al., 2004), the SI and $\frac{1}{2}$ DO \times SI genetic groups present similar ($P > 0.05$) tenderness. The higher value ($P < 0.05$) for SF in the $\frac{3}{4}$ DO \times SI lambs (Table 6) can be associated with the collagen solubility and content, as cited by Rhee et al. (2004) and Warner et al. (2010).

No differences ($P > 0.05$) were observed for IMF (Table 6), but some studies have shown a positive effect of the Dorper breed on the marbling in sheep meat (Shackelford et al., 2012).

The meat color variables were similar ($P > 0.05$) among the three genetic groups and above the acceptable threshold values for lightness and redness of 34 (L^*) and 9.5 (a^*), respectively, established by consumer evaluations of fresh lamb meat (Khlijji et al., 2010).

The tissue dissection of the leg showed that the crossbred lambs present higher ($P < 0.05$) values for M:B and MDP, confirming that the Dorper breed increased the muscle content in carcass improving the M:B by 16% and the MDP by 2.5 percentage points.

4. Conclusion

The Dorper crossbred lambs produced heavier commercial cuts with higher muscle tissue share in a shorter productive cycle than the Santa Inês lambs by improving variables such as growth performance, feed conversion, age at slaughter and the main carcass characteristics without impairing the meat traits. The use of the Dorper breed in crossbreeding with Santa Inês ewes is shown to be a good alternative for the efficient production of meat sheep in Brazil.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interests in this manuscript.

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