

Beef Quality Assurance is for Everyone

Carla Huston, DVM, PhD, ACVPM

Dept. of Pathobiology and Population Medicine

Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine

Submitted to Cattle Business Magazine, March 2014



Close to 9 million pounds of meat products were recalled early this February in California – a stark reminder that concern over food wholesomeness and safety is a constant and important consumer issue. The top quality challenged identified by the most recent 2011 National Beef Quality Audit was food safety, and consumers not only deserve, but demand a safe food supply. Anyone involved in the cattle industry, from the cow-calf rancher to the retailer, has a stake in beef quality assurance.

As you start planning for spring, keep in mind that every management practice that you or your veterinarian performs on your cattle may affect the wholesomeness and quality of the end product. The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Program is a national program that raises consumer confidence through offering proper management techniques and a commitment to quality within every segment of the beef industry. Beef Quality Assurance guidelines are intended to provide consistency in good management practices, and include guidelines on feedstuffs, feed additives and medications, processing/treatment records, injectable animal health products, and care and husbandry practices.



Every management practice that you perform on your farm may affect the wholesomeness and quality of the end product.

The goal of the BQA program is to assure our consumers that all cattle shipped from a beef production facility are healthy, wholesome and safe. BQA is designed to enhance carcass quality by preventing residues, pathogen contamination and carcass defects such as injection site blemishes and bruises. Many of the BQA herd health guidelines have been discussed previously in this column: proper use of vaccinations to prevent disease, proper care of biologicals, and developing good biosecurity protocols, to name a few. The program also asks everyone involved with beef production to follow the FDA/USDA/EPA guidelines for product use and to use common sense, reasonable management skills, and accepted scientific knowledge to avoid product defects at the consumer level.

The Mississippi BQA Program is a cooperative effort between beef producers, veterinarians, nutritionists, and professionals from the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association, Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, MSU Extension Service, and MSU College of Veterinary Medicine based on recommended national guidelines and scientific

research. The MS-BQA program consists of three production themes based on good management practices (GMP's) for livestock: targeted breeding, proper management and responsible culling. **Targeted breeding** in your herd equals customer satisfaction, concentrating on carcass products as the ultimate consumer endpoint. This includes setting production goals for your operation and using known genetics and a defined breeding plan to meet these goals. **Proper management** practices enhance beef quality and product value, and assist in preventing problems rather than fixing them. Adopting good management practices will help you improve on things that you are already doing, for example, by providing processing, medication and record-keeping guidelines.

Responsible culling improves herd productivity and efficiency by ensuring that you do not keep your problem animals. This includes giving attention to quality control points such as body condition, reproductive management, and disease control.

Beef Quality Assurance producer certification can be accomplished by attending a MS-BQA meeting and by completing test questions and the personal code-of-conduct contract. Certification is also offered in conjunction with the Mississippi Master Cattle Producer program. There is currently no charge for certification, and re-certification is required every three years. Additional BQA programs have also been developed for Transportation Quality Assurance (TQA) and Dairy BQA, as well as a specialized Train-the-Trainer program for veterinarians.

This spring, Mississippi cattle producers can attend a live BQA program through the Beef Cattle Boot Camps offered at the MAFES South Farm and Brown Loam Experiment Stations in April. For a limited time, free Beef Quality Assurance training is also available online thanks to Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc. The free program ends April 15, 2014. The certification program can be found at: http://www.bi-vetmedica.com/divisions/cattle/training_programs.html

For more information on the MS-BQA program or to find the next BQA training meeting in your area, go to <http://msucare.com/livestock/beef/#>, or contact your local Extension county director or livestock specialist.

Remember, as cattle producers, we are responsible for delivering a safe and wholesome food supply. Seedstock, cow-calf and dairy producers, stocker operators, feeders, and veterinarians all must take responsibility for the production of a safe food product through proper animal care, handling, and management practices.