

Beef Quality Assurance is for Everyone

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Every year at this time, beef consumption increases across the US due to the popularity of family gatherings and cookouts. The good news is that high prices haven't kept consumers from eating beef. While I have every confidence in the burger or steak that I put on my plate, concern over food wholesomeness and safety is a constant and important consumer issue. The top quality challenge 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.

Every management practice that you or your veterinarian perform on your cattle may affect the wholesomeness and quality of the final beef 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.



The goal of the BQA program is to assure our consumers that all cattle shipped from any beef production facility are healthy, wholesome and safe. The animals should have been raised in a proper manner, following good management practices. 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.

The Beef Quality Assurance Program is a flexible program that changes to meet the needs of the consumers and producers based on sound science and research. New BQA guidelines published within the past year have established recommendations for pain control and humane euthanasia in cattle, among other things. Another hot topic in the livestock industry is the new veterinary feed directive (VFD) laws that will be implemented within the next few years. These changes to drug regulations will likely affect most of us in the cattle industry in some way, and it's important to review your best management practices now with your herd veterinarian so that you do not get caught off guard when new regulations take place. So if you have never been BQA certified, or if it has been awhile since you took a certification course, now is a good time to get updated on some really important cattle health and BQA topics.

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. 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.

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.