

The BQA Buzz

By Leslie Smith, AGA Customer Service

Beef Quality Assurance, also known as BQA, is a buzzword that is frequently used in beef industry conversation, but what is it? Most producers think the program teaches how to properly give injections to cattle. Yes, BQA teaches how to properly give injections, but it encompasses much more. BQA involves many different facets of cattle production including animal welfare, nutrition, pesticide management, traceability, and record keeping.

The program began in 1982 when three feedlots and the United States Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) evaluated production practices to assess the risk of violative residues in food animals. After three years of research, the group established a Pre-Harvest Beef Safety Production Program that became the foundation of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) BQA program.

The BQA program unites cattle producers in a common goal of producing safe, wholesome beef that provides consumers a great eating experience. The BQA program was developed as a systematic, preventative approach to producing a highest quality beef product.

BQA participants are required to follow Food and Drug Administration (FDA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines. Producers must also use common sense, management skills, and scientific knowledge.

In 1991, the first National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) was conducted to examine all phases of beef production. The study found carcass non-conformities were costing an average of \$280 for every fed steer or heifer in the United States for a total of \$7.2 million lost each year.

This spurred the BQA program into action as a communication medium to inform producers about the effects of injection-site blemishes, hide damage, bruise damage, excessive carcass weights, reduced quality from low marbling scores, excessive fat, and lack of consistency.

Researchers realized with correct management these quality challenges could be reduced and market value would increase. According to Dr. W. Edwards Deming, creator of Total Quality Management, it takes \$1 to prevent defects at production, \$10 to fix defects at manufacturing, and \$100 to repair damage to customer.

The 2000 National Beef Quality Audit showed significant improvements in beef quality, increased availability of closely trimmed beef, heightened producer awareness of quality problems, improved cutability, extended shelf and retail case-life of beef products.

In September 2004, the BQA program will expand with the Transportation Beef Quality Assurance (TBQA) program. This program will address transportation issues such as animal welfare and bio-security. This program is aimed to raise awareness of effectively transporting cattle to livestock haulers and producers.

According to Dr. Gary Cowman, NCBA Executive Director of Technical Services, the BQA program has evolved over the past 15 years. "The program has addressed consumer's wants in developing a safe and wholesome product," says

Cowman. Cowman believes most producers are cognizant of antibiotic use and withdrawals.

In the last 10 to 12 years, food safety issues and awareness of issues has been heightened. He finds producers feel good about their product and they feel responsible for developing a quality product.

National BQA Guidelines

The National BQA guidelines are divided into five categories: feedstuffs, feed additives and medications, processing/treatment and records, injectable animal health products, and care and husbandry practices.

Feedstuffs

In order to feed healthy cattle, it is essential to start with healthy feed. Ruminant-derived protein sources cannot be fed per FDA regulations. Feeding by-product ingredients should be supported with sound science.

It's essential to analyze feedstuffs prior to use. Producers should monitor the feed quality prior to use. Typically feed should be bright and uniform in color, clean smelling, room temperature with no evidence of heating, free of foreign material and uncontaminated of bird, rodent, or insect droppings and urine. Supplier assurance of feed ingredient quality is recommended.

Records for pesticide/herbicide application should be maintained. Pasture or crop treatments can lead to violative residues in grazing cattle or feedlot cattle.

Feed Additives

When using medicated feed additives you must follow antibiotic use guidelines. Only FDA-approved medicated feed additives can be used in rations and must be used in accordance with the FDA Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) regulation. Extra-label use of feed additives is illegal and strictly prohibited. Producers must also follow withdrawal times to avoid violative residues.

Records should be kept when formulating and feeding medicated feed rations to ensure all additives are withdrawn in appropriate time. Feeding records should be kept for a minimum of two years.

Processing/Treatment and Records

All antibiotic treatments used should closely adhere to label directions and all FDA/USDA/EPA guidelines to minimize development of anti-microbial antibiotic resistance in humans and animal pathogens. Extra-label drug use shall be kept to a minimum, and used only when prescribed by a veterinarian working under a Valid Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR). Producers should strictly abide by extended withdrawal periods as determined by the veterinarian.

Treatment records are required. Records should identify the individual animal or group treated, the date of treatment, the product (s) administered, the manufacturer's lot/serial number for the product (s) used, the size of the dosage, the dispensed route, the location of administration, who administered the product, and the earliest date the animal will clear withdrawal period.

Before cattle (fed and non-fed) can be released to harvest, all animals treated should meet or exceed label or prescription withdrawal times. All treatment and processing records should be transferred to the new owner. Prospective buyers must be informed of any cattle that have not met withdrawal times.

Injectable Animal Health Products

Cattlemen are urged to use antibiotics with low dosage rates. Products cleared for subcutaneous (SQ), intravenous (IV) or oral administration are recommended.

Products labeled for subcutaneous administration should preferably be administered SQ in the neck region. Products labeled for intra-muscular (IM) use shall be given in the neck region only (no exceptions, regardless of age) and should be limited to 10 cc per IM injection site. All products cause tissue damage when injected IM. Therefore all intra-muscular injections should be avoided if possible.

Injection site lesions negatively impact tenderness and product presentation. The 1995 NWQA found 11 percent of the carcasses surveyed had at least one injection site lesion. Injection site lesions account for about a \$7.05 loss for each marketed fed steer or heifer.

Care and Husbandry Practices

Producers should follow the Quality Assurance Herd Health Plan that conforms to good veterinary and husbandry practices. All health records should be kept for a minimum of two years and restricted use pesticide records should be kept for three years.

Facilities (fences, corrals, load-outs, etc.) should be inspected regularly to ensure proper care and ease of handling. Proper restraint can reduce bruising, stress, and injury to the animal. Bruising costs the cattle industry \$22 million each year.

Cattlemen should strive to maintain an environment appropriate for production. Cattlemen should provide appropriate nutritional and feedstuffs. Feed and water equipment should be kept clean to optimize cattle performance.

Bio-security measures should be implemented to prevent introduction or transmission of animal diseases. Additionally bio-security measures prevent

production losses, prevention of premature culling of animals, and improve production costs. Bio-security is essential to global trade, food safety, and antibiotic resistance.

Side Bar 1:

Quality Assurance Code of Ethics

I will only participate in the marketing of cattle that:

- Are safe, wholesome and do not pose a public health threat;
- Are managed under state and national quality assurance guidelines;
- Are free of any terminal condition (including advanced lymphosarcoma, septicemia, etc);
- Are in acceptable body condition
- Are free of prolapses with visible fetal membranes
- Are free of advanced eye lesions; and
- Are free of advanced lump jaw.

Furthermore, I will:

Do everything possible to humanely gather, handle, and transport cattle in accordance with accepted husbandry practices.

Finally, I will:

Humanely euthanize cattle when necessary to prevent suffering.

Side Bar 2

How do I become BQA-Certified?

To become BQA certified contact your state BQA affiliate, coordinator, or beef council. As technology and livestock management procedures advance it's important producers are updated and re-certified every two to three years. Re-certification is getting easier in some states with on-line re-certification.

Why should I follow BQA guidelines?

There are numerous reasons why cattle producers should follow BQA guidelines. "BQA is a way for producers to show concern to the consumer," Cowman says. "The producer has the responsibility and holds the product."

Producers who fail to abide BQA guidelines could jeopardize the integrity of all producers, the approval of new animal health products, and the availability of anti-microbials. The beef and dairy industries could be forced to comply with further government regulations if BQA guidelines aren't followed. Additionally as programs like national animal identification, source-verification, country-of-origin labeling comes to the forefront, BQA certification will become more imperative.

BQA-certified producers are also getting more marketing opportunities in the marketplace. For example, the American Gelbvieh Association offers the SmartBuy incentive program. To order SmartBuy tags producers must complete the **SmartCross Certification** form, along with vaccinating all calves using the VAC 34 or VAC 45 vaccination program and following BQA injection guidelines by giving all injections in the neck.

Quotes:

“Quality in our product, quality in the way we manage our resources, quality in our association... If we commit to excellence, we will satisfy our customer. We will improve the image of our industry. We will be more profitable.” NCA President Don Smith, 1991

“The beef industry is its own worst enemy.” Conclusions of the Beef Quality Audit