

Lessons in Stockmanship

Cattle-handling experts give lessons in proper stockmanship.

Story & photos by Troy Smith, field editor

Maintaining the quality and safety of beef through producer education is the focus of the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program. Accordingly, training in stockmanship and stewardship was offered during the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

"Everything we do to be better stockmen is important," said cattle-handling clinician Curt Pate, who teamed with Texas AgriLife Extension Educator Ron Gill to conduct a live cattle-handling demonstration.

Handling cattle. "Cattle handling is part of managing the cattle environment. When you step into the pen with cattle, you become a part of their environment," emphasized Pate. "You need to have the right attitude, and you need to have your facilities set up so you have confidence that what you are going to do will work."

Gill said that doesn't mean working facilities have to be fancy, but they need to be safe for the animals and the handlers. They will work best if they also allow the handler to take advantage of the animals' natural behavior. Low-stress cattle handling promotes a more desirable outcome whenever cattle have to be moved or processed.



BQA offer

For a second year, the checkoff-funded Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program is giving cattlemen the chance to become certified for free thanks to a partnership with Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc. (BIVI) and the Beef Cattle Institute (BCI) housed at Kansas State University. The cost of BQA certification is normally \$25-\$50; however, from Feb. 3 through April 15, 2014, BIVI will defray the cost of the certification or recertification, making it free. Visit www.bqa.org/team or www.bivi-bqa.com to get started.



► Curt Pate (left) and Ron Gill offer tips to emergency-response personnel and cattlemen in how to best handle cattle and want-to-be helpers in an emergency situation.

(left) "Keeping cattle calm is important to the success of an immunization program or when administering treatment for disease. It's also better for the handler's health," quipped Gill.

Pate and Gill demonstrated how to use an animal's balance point to elicit movement. Showing how to apply and release pressure, they showed the audience how to guide animals, singly or as a group, in a desired direction when sorting or putting cattle through a processing system.

Administering vaccines

Gill also discussed proper handling and administration of vaccines or injectable antimicrobial products. He advised producers to keep vaccines cool and away from sunlight while working chuteside. He warned against the use of disinfectants when cleaning syringes, and emphasized proper administration of injectable products.

"Injections should be given in the neck and multiple injections should be spaced at least 4 inches apart, especially products delivered intramuscularly (IM). Subcutaneous (sub-Q) injections can also be administered in front of the shoulder or in the dewlap," said Gill, noting that injections in the hip or rump are apt to cause lesions that remain in beef muscle cuts at slaughter.

"A lot of cow-calf producers mistakenly believe that lesions aren't going to occur when injecting baby calves. It can happen, though, and a lesion lasts for the life of the animal," Gill warned.

Gill also noted how producers using injectable products for synchronized artificial insemination (AI) sometimes give those injections in the hip. They think it's easier, he added, but they're forgetting that those heifers or cows will eventually go into the food chain.

"There's no excuse for giving an injection in a muscle cut," stated Gill.

In an emergency

Could you provide effective assistance at the site of an accident involving a truck or stock trailer loaded with cattle? A wrong response, no matter how well-intentioned, can endanger humans, as well as the animals involved. With that in mind, a BQA training session for law-enforcement officials and other emergency personnel, as well as cattle producers, was offered Feb. 4 during the convention. Attendees were schooled in procedures for freeing animals trapped in vehicles, containing animals running loose, and administering humane euthanasia to severely injured animals.

Gill and Pate talked potential first-

responders through several scenarios, imparting tips for understanding animal behavior. Frightened cattle running loose in the wake of an accident is one of the most common situations first-responders might face. Gill said animal panic is only worsened by sirens, flashing lights and a throng of yelling, arm-waving people. Sometimes one or more panicked animals ends up being shot when that scenario might have been avoided. Humans can be hurt or killed by panicked animals.

"Giving stressed animals some space and allowing them to calm down for 30 to 45 minutes is often the best approach," advised Gill. "A crowd of people wanting to help, but not knowing how to do it, can be a big problem."

Pate related an experience involving the rollover of a truck hauling fat cattle that occurred in a busy downtown area. Plenty of people wanted to do the right thing. Very few were, because it wasn't a coordinated effort.

"One person needs to take charge and control the actions of people," said Pate.

Among the recommendations offered by Pate and Gill were the following:

- Maintain a minimum distance and loose-herd animals while finding or creating a place for them to go.
- Portable panels often are brought in to contain loose animals. Make sure they are anchored as well as possible. Remember, once corralled, cattle are still capable of moving or tearing down the panels.
- Recognize the signs that an animal is going on the fight, including an elevated

head, erect ears, tightened jaw muscles and switching tail.

- Never step in front of a running animal. It probably won't stop.
- Try to work animals as a group rather than singly. A lone animal is more likely to panic and become dangerous.
- Don't direct car headlights or spotlights directly at animals as the lights could temporarily blind them.
- Remember, human life and safety must take precedence over that of the cattle.

Pate and Gill also demonstrated low-stress

stockmanship techniques for keeping animals calm while herding, penning or loading into a trailer.

J.K. Shearer, Iowa State University Extension veterinarian, talked about humane euthanasia of severely injured animals, describing the proper technique for using firearms or a captive bolt device.

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Editor's Note: Troy Smith is a freelancer and cattleman located near Sargent, Neb. This article is part of the Angus Journal's event coverage available in the Newsroom at www.4cattlemen.com.



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First BQA Producers' Forum convened

Forum reviews history and goals of BQA Program and looks to the future of producer education within new committee structure.

The first-ever Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Producer Forum was convened Feb. 5 during the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn. BQA is a nationally coordinated, state-implemented program that provides systematic information to U.S. beef producers and consumers about how scientific knowledge and commonsense husbandry practices can be applied to cattle production.

"BQA is not about regulation. We provide education and guidelines," said Oklahoma veterinarian Bob Smith, a member of the national BQA Advisory Board.

"We are outcome-based," added Smith. "It's interesting that foreign countries that try to regulate every step of production don't have outcomes as good as here, in this country."

Fellow veterinarians and advisory board members Dee Griffin of Nebraska and John Maas of California also helped review the history and goals of BQA. They explained how BQA has evolved into a program of sound, science-based production practices

aimed at improving consumer satisfaction and confidence, and enhancing marketing opportunities for beef. Proactive producers trained and certified in BQA keep detailed records to assure that their management and husbandry practices meet regulatory and industry standards.

Much of the forum's question-and-answer session focused on how cattle feeders can respond if beef packers call for audits of suppliers. Griffin said BQA feedlot-assessment guidelines could be obtained from state BQA coordinators or accessed through www.bqa.org, and third-party assessments may be conducted by local veterinarians or state cattle association and university personnel.

In response to questions about this hastily scheduled forum, John Maas, who chairs the BQA Advisory Board, explained that it was created in the wake of National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) committee restructuring and elimination of the Joint Producer Education Committee.

"I think that committee was valuable, and others seem to think so too," Maas said, encouraging producers in agreement to get involved trying to "reinvent" an avenue by which producers readily provide input, not just to the BQA program, but to all producer education efforts.

— by Troy Smith, field editor