

VETERINARY CALL



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Beef Quality Assurance: youth focus

Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training for youth in the beef industry accomplishes many important objectives.

It helps to assure beef produced by cattle managed or cared for by youth meet the expectations of the beef-consuming public. Additionally, it teaches the next generation of beef cattle producers about the current best practices to protect the health and well-being of cattle, and to assure safe meat products and a high-quality eating experience for consumers.

Every state or region in the United States has an active BQA program funded by Beef Checkoff money, as well as other grants. The educational materials used in BQA programs are created at the national as well as state level, and address proper management techniques and a commitment to quality within all the segments of the beef industry. Producing a quality product that meets the needs of consumers has always been important in the beef industry, but in this day of increasing connectedness on the Internet and social media, the principles of BQA are more important than ever to protect consumer confidence in the beef industry.

The husbandry skills and habits that support BQA should be developed as soon as young beef producers start working with cattle. The basic foundations are built on producing cattle and using available products in a

manner that can be easily defended to the ultimate beef consumer.

The primary BQA educational objectives have been expanded over time. The first objectives focused on the proper use of injectable medications to eliminate the risk of violative chemical residues in meat and to minimize the occurrence of injection site blemishes on carcasses. Additional emphasis on the rapid diagnosis and treatment of common diseases and injuries that can affect cattle is important from an animal welfare perspective and has been an important component of BQA training. More recently, training materials for cattle care and handling, transporting cattle, and using antibiotics appropriately have been created to address additional issues.

Training focused on cattle care and handling helps to assure cattle are provided necessary food, water, disease protection, safe housing and handling facilities, and both cattle and people are safe when cattle are moved through pens, alleyways, and squeeze chutes. BQA training focused on cattle transport helps to assure cattle are loaded and unloaded into trailers safely, protected from inclement weather, and guarded from injury so they arrive at their destination safe and sound.

A BQA training manual addressing antibiotic stewardship for beef producers covers topics such as avoiding residues of veterinary drugs or pesticides in meat, establishing valid veterinary-client-patient relationships, proper administration of veterinary drugs, extra label drug use, and recordkeeping to document antibiotic use and monitor withdrawal times.

BQA self-assessments are also available to benchmark key indicators in areas such as animal welfare, cattle handling, facilities and equipment, and recordkeeping. These self-assessments are intended to be used as an educational exercise to identify areas for improvement or by a third-party assessor to document adherence to BQA principles.

The principles of Beef Quality Assurance are important for beef producers of every age. For youth just starting in the beef industry, committing to sound BQA principles establishes good habits that will serve them well throughout their careers.

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