



Creating a Culture

Beef Quality Assurance is a positive story of continuous management improvement.

Story & photos by Kasey Brown, senior associate editor

In an industry that values tradition, there is certainly a place for progressive thinking and continual improvement in all areas of the cattle community. The national Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program's goal is to raise consumer confidence through offering proper management techniques and a commitment to quality within every segment of the beef industry.

"It's about creating a culture for quality management," says Dan Thomson, Jones professor of epidemiology and production medicine at Kansas State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "Nobody cares more

about the cattle industry than the people in the beef industry."

The beauty of BQA is that it isn't a mandatory program; it is an education program and shows just how many progressive cattlemen there are, says Tracey Walsh, director of industry relations for South Dakota BQA. BQA helps ensure to consumers that their beef was raised in the best possible way, and it has evolved from just addressing injection-site lesions.

Answering the why

Thomson adds that BQA training helps

answer for consumers the "why" behind management practices. It is a cornerstone program to help the ag community keep technologies and the things used on a day-to-day basis. The public is increasingly detached from agriculture, and individuals frame their views on animals from their pets.

Less than 2% of the population works in production agriculture, yet 60% of the population owns pets, Thomson explains. More people act like their pets are children, which skews the public's view of livestock even more. Throw in rampant misinformation spread easily through social



► Steve Paisley, Wyoming BQA state coordinator, suggested some BQA tips for working chuteside at the Range Beef Cow Symposium. Recognize flight zones, pressure and release, and balance, he said. When working cattle, use visual driving aids instead of noise aids like rattle paddles. When administering injections in the neck, he reminded cattlemen to stay away from the nuchal ligament because it raises and lowers the head and can cause discomfort if injected.

a benchmark for many areas of the operation.

Each of these assessments has customizable, fill-in-the-blank template forms as a resource for cattlemen. The forms can be used as-is or modified to fit each operation.

Working chuteside

Thomson adds that documentation of employee training for acceptable methods on things like calving, castration, dehorning, downed animal care and euthanasia can be supplemented by a local veterinarian.

“Local vets can be used for so many more things, like training and dehorning,” he clarifies. “Vets are always learning new things, and cattlemen can ask for new techniques on management practices.”

Another large component of BQA is proper animal handling, both in terms of stockmanship and facilities.

Thomson notes that when designing facilities, or when possible to alter current facilities, cattle prefer to move from dark to light, so cattlemen should work on transitions going into barns, like using transition netting or sunroofs. He recommends lighting the processing barn to match the light of a cloudy day. Cattle also prefer moving downhill to uphill because they can see what’s coming. Cattlemen can use light and topography to help move cattle, and avoid having 90° turns when moving cattle because they can’t see a way out.

He points out that 90% of handling issues are getting cattle into the chute or alley system.

Steve Paisley, Wyoming BQA state coordinator, urges cattlemen to recognize flight zones, pressure and release, and balance. When working cattle, use visual driving aids instead of noise aids like rattle paddles.

When working cattle in the chute, he recommends using nonslip flooring whenever possible for the animals’ welfare and that of those working the cattle. Adding

action plan for inevitable bad weather. The program lets you train and educate yourself, your family and your employees. It develops checklists and encourages complete records, it documents standards of procedures, and it has you double-check what you’ve already implemented.

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BQA works to ensure all livestock have these five freedoms — freedom from thirst and hunger; discomfort; pain, injury and disease; fear or distress; and to express normal behavior — and

Thomson adds that it ensures freedom from abuse or neglect.

Admitting that every industry has its bad apples, Thomson assures that most cattlemen are doing things correctly. They just aren’t documenting it, so it is harder to show consumers the positive story. While cattlemen generally don’t enjoy doing paperwork, documentation is a large component of BQA. Written standard operating procedures (SOPs), or best management practices (BMPs), and training documents are highly encouraged in BQA training. Thomson notes that the BQA website, www.bqa.org, has self-assessments for cow-calf, stocker and feedlot operations. These assessments act as



media, and BQA is a way to connect farmers to consumers.

Thomson works with the World Organization of Animal Health (OIE), of which 75% of its members are developing countries. The United States can afford to have problems in management, but these problems still need to be addressed and consumers assuaged, he notes. The biggest asset of BQA is that it creates a culture of improved management instead of just passing an audit.

Walsh explains that the basics of the BQA program include taking a look at what could go wrong and figuring out a plan to avoid problems, like having an emergency

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padded working areas next to the chute can take care of the people working with you.

Thomson stresses that floors should not be slick, adding that small grooves don't work for traction. He recommended 1.5-inch (in.) by 1.5-in. grooves in concrete floors, warning not to pour too much concrete too quickly. Though he has seen rebar used to create traction when exiting a chute, it can cripple cattle. He strongly suggests rubber matting, sand or dry dirt instead.

Administering medication

Shots should never be given in the hindquarter. They should always be given in the neck and subcutaneously (below the skin) whenever possible. When administering injections in the neck, Paisley reminds cattlemen to stay away from the nuchal ligament because it raises and lowers the head and can cause discomfort if injected.

Nebraska BQA Director Rob Eirich adds that no more than 10 cc should be given per injection site, and all injection sites should have 4 in., or a hand's width, between them. Additionally, low-dosage, subcutaneous products are encouraged to minimize risk of tissue damage and improve efficacy.

Always use a clean, sterile and correct-size needle when administering injections. Eirich explains, "Don't use antibacterial soap to clean syringes; use hot water to sterilize them instead. The antibacterial soap will counteract the antibiotic or vaccine."

Never put used needles back in the bottle to refill, emphasizes Eirich. It's worth a 5¢ needle to prevent a sick calf.

Paisley explains that irritated tissue creates a walled-off area around it, getting less circulation to and from the area and thus less efficacy of the medication. Dirty needles cause these walled-off areas.

For durability, Paisley recommends using aluminum-hub needles rather than plastic. Steel hubs are even more durable, but more expensive.

There are many types of syringes — metal and automatic, and those that can hold the vaccine bottle — but he doesn't like using those that can hold the vaccine bottle because if you should drop the syringe or get bumped against the chute, there is a large chance of losing the whole bottle of vaccine.

For disposing of sharps, Paisley says the university is required to use biological canisters, which anyone can order. He suggests making a homemade sharps container out of a laundry detergent bottle. It's more durable than a milk jug, he notes. If the container is puncture-proof, it can be thrown away in the trash.



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With antibiotics being a current hot topic, Eirich says antibiotic stewardship is not a new topic for BQA-certified cattlemen. BQA has addressed it since the 1980s.

He urges cattlemen to have written protocols for antibiotic use, for both treatment and prevention. Antibiotic resistance comes more from treatment than prevention. With changes due to the veterinary feed directive (VFD) and changes in drug development, written protocols are incredibly important, though systems can be as simple as stored in a smartphone note or the calving book.

Be cognizant of animal health labels, especially active ingredients, use and dosage, withdrawal times, storage, expiration date, and lot number. An additional digital resource available (both as a website, www.bayer.naccvp.com, and a smartphone app) is the *Compendium of Veterinary Products*, Eirich says.

Recordkeeping is important, he stresses, recommending records be kept for three years. Necessary records include health-product inventory, processing records, treatment records, withdrawal times and maximum residue levels, feedstuff inventories, and feed additives. He suggests taking a picture of the drug's label, lot numbers and expiration dates with your smartphone to keep on file. Then you can take the box label off and staple it to your records.

Libby Bigler, Colorado BQA state

coordinator, notes that only antibiotics administered by feed or water will be affected in the VFD in January 2017, not injectables. Additionally, only medications that are considered medically important to humans will be affected. The only current drug affected for cattle is tilmicosin. In January 2017, affected cattle-relevant drugs will include neomycin, tylosin, virginiamycin, chlortetracycline and oxytetracycline.

VFDs will also enforce a veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR). Veterinarians will determine the dose within label options, the number of cattle to which the drug can be administered, the amount purchased, duration of use, and the expiration date of the VFD, Bigler explains.

The VFD will require more paperwork that the producer, veterinarian and feedmill will have to keep for two years. This also means that some forward thinking will be needed to get any feed or water additives to get the paperwork in order first.

BQA training keeps cattlemen abreast of current issues and new management practices to increase efficiency. Once BQA certification is achieved, it is good for three years, and Thomson stresses the importance of getting recertified when the time comes. Many times throughout the year, BQA certification is offered at no cost to cattlemen through sponsorships like Boehringer Ingelheim. For more information, check out www.bqa.org.