

Four Honored for BQA

by **Melissa Slagle**, *Cattlemen's Beef Board*

Two producers were honored with the checkoff's annual national Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) and Dairy Beef Quality Assurance (DBQA) awards, created to recognize outstanding beef and dairy producers who incorporate BQA principles as part of their day-to-day activities. In addition, an individual also was recognized with the BQA Marketer Award, while another individual received the BQA Educator Award.

The 2014 winners were: Mike and Anne Wirtz, TZ Cattle Co. of Brenham, Texas; Keith York, Merry-Water Farms of Lake Geneva, Wis.; Dell King, King Livestock Co. Inc. of Hopkinsville, Ky. (Marketer of the Year); and Clyde Lane, University of Tennessee (Educator of the Year).

Mike and Anne Wirtz

TZ Cattle Co., owned by Mike and Anne Wirtz, is an integrated cow-calf operation. The base herd is purebred Santa Gertrudis. The commercial herd is Santa Gertrudis × Hereford and Santa Gertrudis × Angus. Calves are preconditioned using a modified Vac-45 program, raised on grass to 800 pounds (lb.), then sent to the feedlot. Calves are sold on the grid or contracted on a natural program. All are age-, process- and source-verified.

High-quality beef begins with genetics. Angus and Hereford are utilized in a terminal cross to produce high-quality carcasses. The Santa Gertrudis breeding is necessary in their climate and adds hybrid vigor.

The BQA program, when done properly, enhances the carcass value due to low sickness rates and no blemishes in the beef itself. Safe-handling techniques reduce stress, help gain and reduce bruising. This helps to produce a quality product.

"The National Beef Quality Assurance program began in 1986 to counter drug residue and carcass blemishes. As a practicing large-animal veterinarian and producer, I felt we must be at the forefront," Mike says. "Since we did a lot of herd work for our clients, we had the opportunity to teach our veterinary associates, lay staff and our clients about BQA and why they should use BQA-recommended practices. We started by training staff on our own animals about handling, vaccinations, product labels and vaccine handling.

Keith York, Merry-Water Farms

Merry-Water Farms is a family farm that began in 1950 with Keith's parents, Walter and Mary York. He is the third generation on the farm. What began as a 40-cow dairy now includes 1,350 cows, 1,250 replacement heifers and 200 young steers. Keith raises all replacement heifers until they are bred. After they are determined pregnant, two neighbors custom-develop the heifers until 45 days before calving.

"The well-being of our animals is one of the top priorities for our farm," Keith says. "If we take care of our animals they will take care of us. ... Our animals need to be comfortable and stress-free to be as productive as possible."

The farm has made a huge investment in facilities, with the main purpose of making the cows more comfortable and productive. All employees are trained in moving cattle without causing stress.

When it comes to sustainability, Keith says, "Sustainable is defined in many ways, but I view it as a three-legged stool with the three legs being care for the environment, economically sustainable and socially responsible."

Dell King, King Livestock Co.

Family-owned and operated, King Livestock Co. was founded by Dell King in 1967 and is in its 45th year of operation. His wife, Nancy, travels and works with him in their daily operation. Chuck King, his son, is general manager of the order-buying company and the transportation company.

While interacting with Southeastern producers weekly, by either viewing or loading their cattle, Dell has been able to encourage many to become BQA-certified, therefore making more value-added cattle available to the cattle industry.

He helped develop the *BQA Master Cattle Transporter Guide* by working in the development group, meeting with other cattle trucking companies, and appearing in transportation videos detailing proper loading techniques. He also developed a loading card for truck drivers to use in distributing cattle onto the cattle trailers.

One nominator says of Dell: "He does what he says and says what he does. He truly practices what he preaches and is 'Committed

To Excellence,' as stated in his company's name and logo. ... He is the only cattle buyer that consistently comes and appraises most of the load-lot cattle we have to sell, and is the only buyer that is there on loadout day to sort the cattle and load the trucks. He handles the cattle with patience and care, and he does the same with people."

Clyde Lane, University of Tennessee

Clyde Lane has served as the Tennessee BQA coordinator since 1999. He was responsible for implementing the Tennessee BQA Program, which has trained 18,000 individuals since the year 2000. Lane worked on a regional basis to develop regional BQA training materials. He developed bags used to transport vaccines and antibiotics from point of purchase to the farm. The bags also provided BQA information to individuals who may not have been familiar with BQA.

Lane conducted research that showed refrigerators in retail outlets are doing a poor job of maintaining the proper temperature for vaccine storage. He is working with vaccine makers to devise a program to address this problem.

Very active on the national level, he served on the committee to develop the *National BQA Guidelines* and guided their passage by the state coordinators. Along with Jim Turner, Lane designed, filmed and edited the *Transporting Cattle the BQA Way* video, which discusses transporting cattle in stock trailers.

He served as host for the Regional Stockmanship and Steward Program and the national marketing conference programs in Tennessee. He has used BQA materials in college classes and included them in newsletters and web-based video programs.

One nominator says of Lane: "In 2005 Dr. Lane worked with the Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture to have BQA training as a requirement to qualify for the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program. This is a cost-share program on genetics, handling equipment and feeding equipment. To date, producers have qualified for \$60 million in assistance."

For more information visit www.bqa.org.

