

ANGUS

BEEF BULLETIN®

"The Commercial Cattleman's Angus Connection"

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Proving Responsible Food Production

Tyson Foods is assuring customers of responsible food production through its FarmCheck™ animal well-being program.

by **KIM HOLT**, field editor

The bottom line: Consumers do care about the humane handling of food animals.

For example, survey results presented at last fall's National Institute of Animal Agriculture (NIAA) symposium by

Service Management Group Inc. showed that more than 1,900 nationwide shoppers cared more about humane handling than potential impact on the environment for meat, dairy and egg purchases.

This care and concern that is being expressed more and more by consumers is precisely why Tyson Foods Inc. is taking measures in the form of the

Tyson FarmCheck™ Program, its ongoing animal well-being auditing effort, to reflect the company's commitment to responsible food production.

Animal well-being is a core value at Tyson Foods, the nation's leading producer of meat and poultry, and it's the company's belief that consumers deserve to know their food is produced

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Proving Responsible Food Production *(from cover)*

responsibly. Through the implementation of FarmCheck, Tyson Foods will third-party-verify through on-farm audits the treatment of animals by their livestock and poultry suppliers.

Tyson currently works with more than 11,000 independent family farmers, including 5,000 poultry, 3,000 hog and 4,000 cattle raisers.

John H. Tyson, Tyson chairman and grandson of the company's founder, explains on the company's website that Tyson Foods' relationship with farmers is the cornerstone of the company's business.

"One of the greatest things we have to sustain is our relationship with our farmers because, without that relationship, we don't have a business," he says. "Our farmer-partners are critical to our success; we're critical to their success."

When Tyson Foods announced its new audit program in fall 2012, Donnie Smith, Tyson Foods' president and CEO, relayed to the public, "We know more consumers want assurance their food is being produced responsibly, and we think two important ways to do that are by conducting on-farm audits while also continuing to research ways to improve how farm animals are raised."

He also wants people to know that, at Tyson, "We care enough to check on the farm, and we're determined to help find better ways to care for and raise healthy animals."

A Tyson Fresh Meats packer buyer delivered a similar message in fall 2012 to a group of Northwest cattle producers when he shared that the upcoming Tyson Foods' FarmCheck program was becoming a "necessity."

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Burkholder one of 13 on Tyson Foods' advisory panel

Tyson Foods' independent Farm Animal Well-being Advisory Panel is helping guide Tyson Foods' animal well-being research priorities, while suggesting ways to improve the FarmCheck audit program.

One panel member is Anne Burkholder, who manages Will Feed Inc., a *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®)-feedlot partner near Cozad, Neb., recognized as the 2011 CAB Feedlot Partner of the Year for operations with up to 15,000-head capacity.

Burkholder, who is passionate about food-animal production, is also one who fully embraces beef quality assurance. She was the first National Beef Quality Assurance Cattle Producer of the Year in 2009. She was asked in late 2013 to join Tyson Foods' advisory panel as a representative from the production sector.

As the author of *The Feedyard Foodie*, an online blog at www.feedyardfoodie.com, Burkholder shares the "real story of beef" with social media followers, often tackling issues such as antibiotics and animal well-being, including the FarmCheck™ program.

On June 6, 2013, Burkholder posted:

The FarmCheck program is intended to be a natural extension of the Beef Quality Assurance Feed Yard Assessment. With its key elements comprised of core BQA components, FarmCheck extends the current BQA program for feedyards to include an independent third-party auditing component. Auditing serves two purposes:

1. *It creates accountability and verification of animal-care practices on the farm.*
2. *It offers additional assurance for customers that live off-farm that the meat that they purchase at the grocery store comes from animals that were raised responsibly.*

The Farm Animal Well-being Advisory Panel that I sit on will aid Tyson both in the FarmCheck on-farm education and audit program and also provide input on necessary research areas for further study. The panel members will work with Tyson's internal team to create and implement the program.

Donnie Smith, Tyson Foods' president and CEO, describes the advisory panel as a "diverse group of experts who bring valuable perspective on animal well-being."

Each panel member, including Burkholder, was invited to join the panel because of demonstrated leadership and interests across a broad range of issues related to raising farm animals responsibly.

Panel members include:

- Ryan Best, 2011-2012 National FFA president
- Anne Burkholder, cattle feedlot owner, Cozad, Neb.
- Edward Cooney, executive director of the Congressional Hunger Center
- Gail Golab, director of American Veterinary Medical Association's animal welfare division
- Temple Grandin, professor of animal science, Colorado State University
- Karl Guggenmos, dean of culinary education, Johnson & Wales University
- Tim Loula, co-founder and co-owner of Swine Vet Center, Saint Peter, Minn.
- Miyun Park, executive director, Global Animal Partnership
- Ashley Peterson, vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs, National Chicken Council
- Richard Raymond, former USDA undersecretary for food safety
- Janeen Salak-Johnson, associate professor in animal sciences, University of Illinois
- Janice Swanson, chair and professor, animal behavior and welfare, Michigan State University
- Bruce Webster, professor of poultry science, University of Georgia



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Proving Responsible Food Production *(from page 2)*

He pointed out that anybody can reach in a pocket and pull out a cell phone: “The world is no longer round, it’s flat. We’re doing this to allow people to have a better understanding, a better transparency, of what occurs in the beef community.”

He added that he’d been buying beef since 1984 and never, until the last two years, had he had chefs, restaurant owners and retailers touring in his pickup and eating and visiting at his table.

“We’ve had numerous visits to feedlots and ranches. These people want to know; they have an inquiry and want to be informed.”

He further advised cattle producers, “We need to be charging down the field and taking our message with us. The very first environmentalists are sitting in this room. It’s our mission to inform our customers of our attitude, our ID and our transparency.”

FarmCheck’s evolution

Since 2000, Tyson Foods has been charging down its own field, so to speak. In that year, Tyson became one of the first companies in the meat industry to create an Office of Animal Well-being, and this effort was expanded with the development and introduction of its FarmCheck program.

Dean Danilson, who has been vice

president of food safety and quality control for Tyson Foods, is now vice president of animal well-being programs. He and his staff manage the audits for Tyson, as well as its Farm Animal Well-being Research Program.

An external Animal Well-being Advisory Committee, announced last May, oversees both the FarmCheck and research programs. It includes individuals with expertise in farm animal behavior, health, production and ethics (see sidebar on page 2).

Under development since 2012, Tyson reports the audits have been created by experienced veterinarians and animal-welfare experts, and include measures that build upon current voluntary farm industry programs, including Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) guidelines.

At this year’s Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) Cattle Health & Well-being Committee approved a resolution that recommends the current BQA feedlot assessment as a guiding example for third-party audits.

Danilson was also on hand at this year’s Cattle Industry Convention to update cattle producers on the FarmCheck program. In doing so, he explained how the program evolved.

Initially, Tyson’s retail customers

About Tyson Foods

Tyson Foods was founded in 1935 with headquarters in Springdale, Ark. It is one of the world’s largest processors and marketers of chicken, beef and pork and the second-largest food production company in the Fortune 500. It employs 115,000 employees and includes more than 11,000 independent family farmers.

Tyson Foods includes 57 poultry, 13 beef, and nine pork plants, and 25 prepared-food production plants. Fiscal 2013 sales by distribution channel included 43% consumer products, 34% foodservice, 17% international and 6% other.


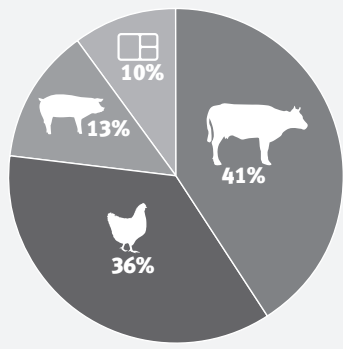


Fig. 1: Fiscal 2013 sales by segment



Segment	Percentage
Beef	41%
Poultry	36%
Pork	13%
Other	10%

began asking for assurances regarding animal handling and treatment at the company’s harvest facilities, to which Tyson responded with an internal audit. More recently, these retail customers also began requesting similar assurances about the treatment of animals on supplier farms and ranches.

These customers expressed to Tyson

their concerns that voluntary programs, such as BQA, aren’t enough because they don’t require third-party verification. Thus, the reason for FarmCheck.

In 2012, Tyson developed its pork audits and began implementing them during 2013, while also initiating the development of poultry and beef audits. Poultry audits began in February; implementation of the beef audit is targeted for mid- to late 2014.

At the convention, Danilson relayed that pork and poultry’s vertically integrated structures lent to easier implementation compared to beef.

Independent ranches and feedlots that produce for the Tyson supply chain will be included in the FarmCheck audit. Animal-welfare training, self-checks and site checks from a third-party auditor are standard elements in the programs.

For example, in the current pork site check, auditors work through a checklist of practices that are graded as “acceptable,” “needs improvement” or “unacceptable.”

According to Danilson, rather than disqualify suppliers that receive less-than-acceptable scores, Tyson works with the farm’s management in order to problem-solve and make improvements along the supply chain.

Ultimately, Tyson believes the audits will verify their farmer-suppliers are, as Smith says, the “best in the world.”

“It doesn’t tell you how to manage your animals, but it will observe if animals are handled appropriately,” he concluded. “The supply chain accountability has changed. If we don’t do it, someone else will do it for us. We don’t want undercover videos to be the driver of business. We are blessed that the beef industry doesn’t have a real ‘lightning rod’ issue right now, but let’s keep it that way.”

For more information about the FarmCheck program, see www.farmcheck.com.

Be prepared for future FarmCheck-type programs

Veterinarian Bruce Hoar is the co-coordinator of the dairy and livestock program at the University of California–Davis (UC–Davis) Western Institute of Food Safety and Security (WIFSS).

The institute’s mission is to conduct research and provide outreach programs that will enhance food safety and defense in all sectors of the food-system continuum, from environment to consumer. WIFSS is administered by the UC–Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Using the BQA assessment as its foundation, WIFSS is developing a formal, third-party assessment tool, with an animal-handling component, for regulators and cattle producers. Through auditor training and data collection, their objective is to help producers review, benchmark and compare data in an effort to modify or change management strategies as needed.

Hoar shares a few thoughts on audits and assessments:

Q: *The announcement of Tyson’s FarmCheck program made major industry headlines in October 2012. Why?*

A: I think any new program will generate interest, and having one come down from Tyson adds relevance and importance, so producers will take notice.

Q: *Should producers be prepared for similar third-party verification-type programs taking shape in the near future?*

A: I think producers should be prepared for additional programs such as FarmCheck. Whether it’s real or just an impression, consumers want to have assurance that the products they consume are not only safe and wholesome, but produced in a manner that they believe involves appropriate treatment/conditions for the animals involved.

Q: *What role do veterinarians play in helping producers carry out programs like these?*

A: Veterinarians have an important role to play. They can act as auditors/assessors themselves. For clients, the veterinarian’s role would be in training and educating them to be ready when the auditor knocks on their door. For example, veterinarians can help develop best management protocols, assist with facility design and educate workers on proper animal handling.

For resource information on assessments, see www.bqa.org. The beef industry has developed its voluntary BQA Assessments for the cow-calf, stocker and feedlot segments. Temple Grandin’s website, www.grandin.com, includes a host of animal well-being information, from an outline of cattle-welfare critical control points to auditing forms.



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