

Outside the Box: Quality and pride of ownership

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Building and delivering quality to the marketplace is fundamental to long-term business success. Economic history also reveals that true quality cannot be faked. Companies that take shortcuts typically undermine the quality and dependability of their products and services, and,

eventually, customers discover the gap between action and word, which leads to lost revenue and damaged reputation.

Not unlike other businesses, producing quality in the beef industry is the foundation upon which consumer demand is built. The process is

complicated by the long biological cycle of cattle production, the multiple phases of production that most calves experience as they move from cow-calf to stocker to feeder to packer, and the disjointed manner in which management information is exchanged as cattle move through the production and marketing channel.

The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program funded by the beef checkoff is designed to harmonize the industry's focus on quality by providing a uniform set of management guidelines that enhance the quality of beef by avoiding practices that create physical, microbiological, and chemical defects.

BQA is a program for cattlemen designed by cattlemen, initiated in 1982 when the National Cattlemen's Association worked cooperatively with the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement a preharvest beef safety program. In the early years, the BQA program was focused on minimizing residues and injection-site blemishes. As the program evolved, it became more comprehensive in focus as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and its state partners worked to create national standards, a unified approach to training, and a certification system. In 2003, the "Cattle Industry's Guide for the Care and Handling of Cattle" was adopted to broaden the program's scope.

BQA focuses on five core management arenas for cow-calf, stocker, and feeder enterprises:

- care and husbandry practices;
- feedstuffs;
- feed additives and medications;
- processing/treatment protocols with an emphasis on animal health product administration; and
- recordkeeping.

Beef's time-honored principles

While space precludes a comprehensive discussion of each of these topics, the basis for BQA is the correct care and handling of cattle. Research has shown that management decisions throughout the life of a calf can affect the ultimate quality of beef. Cattle that contract calfhooch diseases, experience nutritional stress, or receive incorrectly administered injectable health care products have a greater risk of producing beef that is inconsistent in tenderness and palatability. Thus, the ultimate quality of beef reflects the pride of ownership demonstrated in each management decision made throughout the lifespan.

While BQA reflects the best available science-based management protocols, much of the basis for effective handling of cattle is founded on time-honored principles. I recently came across an account of an early-day cowboy's experiences on the ranches of Texas. Roland Warnock worked as a cowboy on

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some of the largest ranches of the Rio Grande Valley and the Big Bend Country from 1910 to 1918, and he took issue with how Hollywood film producers portrayed ranching.

“A lot of those Western plays are unreal,” he said. “They’re running their horses all of the time, here and yonder. The old cowhand didn’t do that, unless it was necessary. He didn’t just race his horse everywhere he would go. A lot of them drive their cattle too fast on the screen. They’re either trotting them or running them as fast as they can go ... That’s not the way we handled cattle, or the way they are handled today on the ranches. They’re handled quiet.”

BQA recognizes that effective stockmen approach raising cattle with the same respect for craftsmanship as shown by master woodworkers, masons or artists. Fortunately there are a number of master stockmen such as Bud Williams, Temple Grandin, Tom Noffsinger, Curt Pate, and Ron Gill who offer educational seminars and materials to enhance the skills of both novice and experienced cattle producers. The Cattle Learning Center offers a “Low-Stress Cattle Handling” DVD at www.cattlelearningcenter.org (click on Redbooks, DVD, and tools icon on the right side of page) for a nominal fee and a variety of other resources can be obtained via an Internet search.

Continuous improvements

Implementing appropriate cattle handling procedures does not require an investment in expensive facilities. However, gaining the advantages of quiet handling does require a commitment to training, communication with employees, veterinarians and truckers, as well as the desire to seek continuous improvement. The advantages of adopting BQA handling protocols include improved profitability by avoiding costly defects, improving the effectiveness of management and labor by reducing stress for both cattle and cowboys, minimizing injury to livestock and damage to facilities, and demonstrating pride of ownership to consumers.

At a time when the industry is battling to capture market share both domestically and abroad, participation in the BQA program empowers management and employees to create quality from pasture to plate. Detailed BQA information can be obtained via www.bqa.org or from the network of state coordinators whose contact information is available via the aforementioned web site.



National Junior Angus Association

Members of the National Junior Angus Association pay an annual fee of \$20, and junior privileges expire at age 21. Junior members have access to all services offered by the American Angus Association, and they receive two issues of the *Angus Journal* per year and the NJAA newsletter, *Directions*.

To apply for membership in the National Junior Angus Association, visit www.njaa.info and download a printable application, or call 816-383-5100 to request the application.



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