



# Quality Audit Shows Gains, Sets Benchmark

The executive summary of the 2005 Beef Quality Audit, partially funded by the beef checkoff, establishes a benchmark for quality goals and targets by the year 2015.

"The audit results prove producers are doing things right to improve beef quality — and the findings support the idea that improved quality has a positive impact on beef demand and our bottom line," said Ran Smith, a Kansas veterinarian and chair of the checkoff-funded Quality Assurance Advisory Board.

The report, titled "Staying on Track," follows previous beef quality audits in 1991, 1995 and 2000. Among other uses, the results will be incorporated into the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program that is now active in 47 states to certify and train producers in quality pre-harvest practices.

Based on the audit, the checkoff-funded BQA program will target five specific education efforts to

improve quality: (1) the effects of animal health product use; (2) quality assurance in care, handling and transportation; (3) marketing opportunities; (4) herd management actions that affect quality; and (5) recordkeeping practices.

Initial results of the 2005 audit were discussed at the 2006 National Cattle Industry Conference in Reno, Nev., in July. The final report provides additional insight into beef quality successes and future challenges over which producers have some or complete control.

The latest audit further identifies the top three quality gains since 2000: (1) improved microbiological safety; (2) improved cattle genetics resulting in higher-quality beef; and (3) fewer injection-site lesions. The rankings are from interviews with beef end users, including exporters, purveyors, foodservice and retail channels.

End users ranked "lack of uniformity/inconsistency in quality" as the most prevalent defect in the U.S. beef industry. That

shortcoming was segregated into four areas: marbling, tenderness, palatability, and inconsistency among and within quality grades.

The audit also cited 10 industry goals:

1. Clarify beef market signals that encourage production of cattle, carcasses and cuts that conform to industry targets.
2. Foster communication and understanding between industry groups/beef supply chain.
3. Move expeditiously toward source and age verification to build supply lines of cattle to fit domestic/export markets.
4. Minimize production of excess fat.
5. Strive for uniformity/consistency in cattle production.
6. Consider how genetics and management affect tenderness.
7. Target weights that optimize profitability without creating quality problems.
8. Recognize marbling as a value-determining trait.

9. Use the results from instrument assessments of cattle, carcasses and cuts to make genetic and management decisions.

10. Select management practices that increase value.

With funding through the Beef Checkoff Program, the national audit was conducted by researchers and scientists from Colorado State, Texas A&M, Oklahoma State and West Texas A&M universities.

The study, conducted between June 2005 and June 2006, collected quality data at 16 U.S. packing plants. The audit collected data from live cattle, carcasses/offal items on the harvest floor, and carcasses after chilling and after ribbing at the 12th/13th rib interface.

Copies of the full audit report may be requested by calling Ryan Ruppert at (303) 850-3369.

**Editor's Note:** This article was provided by the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board (CBB).

