

Quality System Assessment

Missouri launches QSA program.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF IMI GLOBAL)

Story by
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A landmark program in bovine sourcing has emerged through a cooperative effort by multiple organizations, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA), IMI Global Inc., MFA Health Track, Joplin Regional Stockyards, Missouri Cattlemen's Association, Missouri Veterinary Medical Association, Missouri Livestock Marketing Association, the University of Missouri (MU) and MU Extension.

The process started in July 2005 with one goal: to offer beef producers a third-party, source-verified program to allow them to sell spring 2005-born calves for eventual export to Japan. At press time, beef exports to Japan had been halted temporarily until an investigation of the circumstances surrounding

a shipment of ineligible product could be conducted and reviewed.

Meanwhile, many other countries have begun to import U.S. beef, and it is hoped trade with Japan will be restored promptly.

On Oct. 11, 2005,

USDA approved the Quality System Assessment (QSA)

Program and named Missouri as the first state to implement the program. Specifically, QSA is an established set of guidelines that will qualify cattle for Japanese export. Missouri has the second-largest population of cows in the United States, coming in with some 2 million head.

The idea behind QSA is to "provide a way for any Missouri producer to sell age- and source-verified cattle, regardless of affiliation," says Jim Humphrey, MU Extension livestock specialist and QSA third-party verification supplier. Qualifying for this market offers Missouri producers, as well as other producers in states becoming QSA-qualified, a chance at significant premiums. According to a Dec. 12, 2005, news release from MDA, cattle enrolled in the QSA program have sold for \$25-\$35 per head above market price.

Requirements

QSA is a value-added program designed specifically for cattle. In an effort to regain access to important international markets, a joint contract between the U.S. and Japan was composed. It named age and source verification as the two top items of validation. Specifically, delegates from Japan identified beef from cattle 20 months and younger as acceptable for U.S. beef imports, as reported in an Oct. 13, 2005, MDA news release.

The program is for source and age verification only; it doesn't involve verification of preconditioning claims.

The QSA program is beneficial to international trade because it gives customers, "assurance that you are truly meeting their expectations regarding cattle specifications," Humphrey says. "This is probably just the beginning; Japan is driving this initiative right now with their BEV (Beef Export Verification) requirements."

According to the Livestock Marketing Association (LMA), a BEV program is a series of product requirements that the USDA and an export market agree upon and demand of any supplier wishing to export beef into that country's marketplace.

In addition to Japan, more and more customers are requesting imports be enrolled in either a USDA QSA or USDA Process Verified Program (PVP), such as the American Angus Association's AngusSourceSM program. A PVP is similar in design to a QSA program, but a PVP also makes and audits management claims.

Humphrey says it is important to note that participation in a QSA or PVP program, or even completing a general source and age verification affidavit, is completely voluntary. It is a value-added opportunity that offers producers an option in marketing plans.

Getting started

Japan's basic requirements for the cow-calf producer include five important items. First, documented calving records are required. To be eligible for a third-party supplier evaluation, a cow-calf producer must show actual calving records defining the calving season, based on the day, month and year the first calf of that respective crop was born. The proof of calving records leads to the second required item, a defined calving season.

Third, producers must have a unique animal identification (ID)

system — individual or group — in place. "Group ID is where only the birth date of the first calf born needs to be recorded. With group ID, all calves will be given the same birth date as the first calf born, regardless of later calf birth dates," Humphrey says. "With individual ID, every calf's birth date is recorded, and all calves retain their birth date for sorting and selling purposes. In reality, at some point, calves with different birth dates will need to be grouped to ensure the producer is getting the best prices for their calves."

Furthermore, since many cattlemen manage operations differently, QSA requirements don't determine when calves are to be tagged. In other words, calves can be tagged either at birth or at weaning.

There is also a question as to how to ID purchased cattle — for example, graft-on calves purchased at the sale barn and put on a cow.

"Purchased cattle coming from non-QSA-approved or certified herds must be identified separately to ensure the integrity of the program. Purchased cattle may not have the documentation to verify age and source of calves," Humphrey notes. In such a case, non-identifiable cattle would need to be sold separately.

The fourth requirement of the QSA program is a means by which to transfer information. Specifically for the MDA QSA program, transfer of information is done by completing and passing on to the purchaser of the cattle an ID400 form. The ID400 form is the official MDA source- and age-verification form, Humphrey says. The form is copied and transferred with the changing of ownership of cattle.

The fifth and final item needed to enroll in the QSA program is three years' maintenance of cattle records. Maintaining records for QSA should take little extra effort, since similar materials are required to provide the calving dates of the cattle.

In addition, there is no preconditioning program with which producers must comply to participate in QSA. This feature of QSA is



"The tags communicate that the animal is age- and source-verified," Jim Humphrey, MU Extension livestock specialist and QSA third-party verification supplier, notes. (PHOTO COURTESY OF IMI GLOBAL)



PHOTO BY ALBERT BERRY, MW EXTENSION

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—Jim Humphrey

important because cattlemen don't have to change the products or procedures they traditionally use to work their calves.

Participation

Cattle will be age- and source-verified through the efforts of third-party supplier evaluations. One of the first items to be checked through a supplier evaluation is the producer's USDA premises ID. To voluntarily enroll a ranch or farm in the premises ID program, contact MDA online at www.mda.mo.gov, or USDA online at www.usda.gov/nais.

Once a farm or ranch has acquired a premises ID, the producer must agree to an on-site audit of their production records to enroll in QSA; the supplier evaluator/auditor will conduct the audit. If accepted into QSA, producers will be placed on a USDA supplier list. According to LMA, to date there are 43 approved QSA programs that have followed the approval process and that have been granted the right by USDA to begin qualifying cattle for Japanese export. A list of QSA-approved programs is available online at www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/qsap.htm.

Once the producer makes the supplier list, he or she will fill out enrollment forms and purchase a unique set of matched ear tags; the set will include both visual and radio frequency ID (RFID) tags. The tags are program-specific, with the RFID tag always being placed in the left ear of the animal.

“The tags communicate that the animal is age- and source-verified,” Humphrey notes. ID tags may also be used by the producer to receive individual or group carcass data back on calves.

In conclusion, Humphrey says, “QSA programs could become the standard for the industry in the future. The extensiveness of QSA programs will probably be determined by what information beef customers want or demand.”

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