



Vet Call

► by **Bob Larson**, Kansas State University

Beef Quality Assurance: Building foundations for young producers

Just as the foundations of good health are formed when cattle are very young, the foundations for management practices that support Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) should be formed in youth involved in animal agriculture.

Pleasing all customers with health

Producing a quality product that meets the needs for customers and consumers has always been important in the beef industry, but in this day of increasing connectedness on the Internet and social media, the principles of Beef Quality Assurance are more important than ever. The cow-calf producer has two customers to please: the owner of the calves once they leave the ranch and the beef-eating consumer. Both of these customer groups deserve and demand a high-quality product that is free of preventable defects.

The husbandry skills and habits that support BQA should be developed as soon as young beef producers start working with cattle so bad habits don't have to be overcome later in life. The foundational question that every cattle producer (young and old alike) should ask every time they do anything that can impact beef quality is, "Will my customer and the final consumer be pleased that I am managing my cattle and using available products in this manner?" If the answer is "no," then the principles of BQA have been violated.

Once calves leave the ranch, ideally they should adapt quickly to the new environment and ration so that health problems are kept to a minimum and growth and efficiency are enhanced. Supplying calves that have been properly immunized and adapted to concentrate rations will fulfill the needs of cattle feeders. Lingering health problems, drug or physical adulteration that will carry through to the beef-eating consumer, or injection blemishes that carry through the feeding period are

concerns of your feedlot customers.

The beef-eating consumer wants a product that is safe, free from drug residues, free of injection blemishes or abscesses, and flavorful. It is every producer's job to ensure that every steak, hamburger and roast that comes out of his farm, ranch or feedlot can meet the customers' demands. Avoiding drug residues

starts with a plan and recordkeeping system that emphasizes the proper treatment of disease and identification of treated animals.

Proper treatment for any disease begins with using the correct drug at the correct dosage for the proper length of time. In order to ensure that you are meeting these requirements, a close working relationship with a veterinarian is essential. A commitment to keeping animals with drug residues off the consumer's plate

means a few different things.

It means identifying and delaying marketing of animals treated with a drug until such a time as they have been untreated for the minimum number of days stated on the label if the drug was used exactly as specified on the label; or for an extended period of time, as determined by your veterinarian, if the product was used in any extra-label fashion.

In addition to being assured that the beef they purchase is free of residues, consumers have every right to expect their meat to be free of injection blemishes. By following simple standards of sanitation and animal handling, the incidence of injection-site blemishes should be extremely small.

Animals should be properly restrained and the syringes and other dosing equipment should be clean and functioning properly.

Needles should be changed every 10 head, or more frequently if the needle develops a burr or becomes dirty. No more than 10 cc should be administered in any one injection

site. Any product that is labeled for subcutaneous (sub-Q) administration

should be given by that route, and any products labeled for intramuscular (IM) administration only should be given into non-prime cuts, such as the neck muscles, utilizing a clean needle.

Both young and experienced cattlemen, veterinarians, nutritionists and any others involved with the ranch must each examine what could go wrong from their perspective in the delivery of a safe, wholesome and desirable product to the consumer. Once potential problems are identified, strategies or production practices are put into place to avoid those problems from ever occurring. Methods of recordkeeping, employee training and daily practices are instituted to check and verify (and document) that you are accomplishing what you intended to do.

A well-planned BQA program is designed so that everyday working techniques act to eliminate the potential for problems. A good place to start when planning your program is with the Beef Quality Assurance website <http://www.bqa.org/> (funded by Beef Checkoff dollars).

The principles of Beef Quality Assurance have been around for several decades and are supported by the entire beef industry — from cow-calf producers through retail outlets. The success of Beef Quality Assurance depends on each and every beef producer doing his or her part, and good habits started as a young producer are likely to remain throughout life.

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Editor's Note: Bob Larson is professor of production medicine at Kansas State University.



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