



University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

Impact

Beef quality program enhances food safety

The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program, a national initiative, is dedicated to teaching beef producers safety and quality assurance practices in all aspects of their production.

The BQA program's mission is to maximize consumer confidence in beef by focusing the industry's attention on beef quality assurance through the use of science, research and education initiatives.

Issue:

American families expect and deserve quality and wholesome beef in which cow-calf producers are the first link in the production chain. What they do in the raising, feeding and marketing of these animals has an impact on the final beef product. The American consumer has demonstrated that the safety and quality of the food they eat are their top priorities. Thus, BQA has become a national initiative of top priority to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), Nevada Cattlemen's Association and the Cooperative Extension System throughout the nation.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was discovered in the United States in 2004, which stopped exports of U.S., Canadian and English meats. Food-borne diseases, such as E.coli from contaminated meat, sicken thousands of Americans annually. The incentive in this voluntary program is the satisfaction that participants (beef producers) are doing everything in their power to produce a wholesome product. By attending this program and becoming certified, producers are increasing consumer confidence in their product – beef.

What Has Been Done:

BQA is an ongoing program that teaches cattle ranchers in all 50 states about animal genetics, cattle-handling, feed-purchasing, record-keeping, testing and other procedures to produce beef without residue of animal health products or pesticides. Participants work with veterinarians and scientists to learn how to keep their cattle healthy, increase product quality and enhance consumer confidence in their meat.

Since 2000, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) has taught safety and quality assurance practices to more than 600 Nevada beef producers in workshops, during conventions, via distance education and chute-side on ranches. More than 400 ranchers have become BQA-certified.

BQA through producer education was identified as a critical need by the NCBA, the Nevada Cattlemen's Association and UNCE. Ron Torell and Dr. David Thain serve as Nevada's Beef Quality Assurance state program coordinators and teach BQA along with other UNCE staff.

UNCE specialists use a 44-page Nevada-based BQA reference book, computer technology and an informational NCBA-produced CD to teach BQA principles. Participants work closely with veterinarians, scientists and other specialists to keep cattle healthy, as a result improving overall quality and consumer confidence.

In 2007, Cooperative Extensions from Nevada, Idaho and Utah teamed up and acquired an interactive exhibit, "Beef Quality is Every Cattleman's Business." The exhibit traveled throughout the three-state areas, educating more than 15,000 producers and consumers. In Nevada, the 2007 BQA display was exhibited at Bulls for the Twenty-First Century (400 producers), Fallon All Breeds Bull Sale (350 producers), Nevada State Fair (10,000 consumers) and the joint Nevada/California Cattlemen's Convention (800 producers).

In January 2009, the Cattlemen's Update program highlighted BQA and introduced the regional BQA program. The National Market Cow and Bull Beef Quality Audit and Regional BQA Certification also took place.

A low-stress, cattle-handling workshop was taught during the Nevada Cattlemen's Association meeting and Cattlemen's College to more than 150.

Impact:

More than 330 Nevada cattle producers have received national level 1 certification in the BQA program and more than 65 have become level 2 certified. By becoming BQA-certified, producers sign an affidavit that they will implement and follow the guidelines taught in the educational program. Western Video and Superior Livestock, the two auction houses that sell more than 80 percent of Nevada cattle, list cattle originating from BQA-certified ranches on consignments as Nevada BQA-certified.

Producers say that a better demand is realized for cattle processed under BQA guidelines. This program is having an impact on the way cattle are processed and marketed. A post-survey conducted by UNCE shows that 90 percent of participants who became certified have changed the way they process cattle. Additionally, the Nevada BQA program is part of national effort, which has resulted in a 25 percent reduction in the amount of injection site lesions due to improper vaccination protocol on beef cattle.

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Partners:

Nevada Beef Council, Nevada Cattlemen's Association, National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Nevada Department of Agriculture

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