

Walk the Walk

Add value to your operation through BQA certification.

by *Sydnee Shive*

Hereford genetics and quality go together, and the same can be said for Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification and excellent beef.

“Beef Quality Assurance has been around for 30 years,” says Emma Mulvaney, associate director, Beef Quality Assurance programs. “Sound animal practices are at the heart of every farmer and rancher. We ultimately want to make sure that the food that is on your dinner plate is safe, wholesome and quality. And so really, in retrospect, Beef Quality Assurance is assuring the quality of beef. We’re providing educational resources for producers to be able to ‘walk the walk’ of responsible cattle production.”

BQA is based on the idea that production practices affect consumer acceptance of beef, and that the empowerment of beef producers can improve the safety and integrity of beef. It’s a program that holds value from the cow-calf pasture to the grocery store meat case. When producers implement solid record keeping and herd health practices, quality cattle exit the ranch and enter the market, benefiting producers, packers and consumers.

“BQA really wants to focus on teaching and providing the producer educational resources focused around total quality management,” Mulvaney says “Almost every single aspect of your operation and getting that animal to its next phase of life is covered in Beef Quality Assurance, whether that’s behavior and handling, herd health, nutrition or transportation. BQA really is the total package.

“Doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professions must have a license to legally practice or do business. Cattle producers get to voluntarily obtain a BQA certification and carry a ‘social license’ to be able to showcase they are choosing to do things the right way on their operation. However, BQA certifications expire every three years, so producers should make sure their certificate is active and up to date.”

What is BQA certification?

Quality assurance in the beef industry began in the late 1970s with a program called Beef Safety Assurance, with a focus on targeting a variety of beef safety issues. BQA was developed in the late 1980s by cattle producers and has been funded by the Beef Checkoff since the 1990s, with an emphasis on providing information for producers, which also benefits consumers.

“BQA is a training that includes a number of things, from animal handling to proper

vaccination practices to handling medications,”

says Trey Befort, American Hereford Association director of commercial programs. “It has just been a gold standard for that kind of training for a long period of time.”

Attaining your BQA certification is free and easy.

The certification can take

anywhere from an hour and a half to three hours. There are both online and in-person options, with producers being able to choose the training that best works for them.

“You can become BQA certified by visiting BQA.org,” Mulvaney says. “There, you can find in-person trainings in your state by typing in your state and going to that state website or finding contacts for a local trainer nearby. You can also complete the online modules at BQA.org.”

BQA certification is more than an extra marketing tool — it’s a commitment to cattle well-being, food quality and safety and helps uphold the public image of the beef industry. Therefore, consumers have more confidence in beef products. It can increase the value of your beef cattle in the marketplace and enhance herd profitability through the utilization of best management practices.

“By getting your BQA certification, it not only helps you as a producer keep in mind different management practices for your cattle and for your operation, but also helps to give marketing confidence to buyers,” Befort says. “They know that your cattle have been handled properly, and they have more confidence in what you’re selling.”



Hereford producer benefits

According to the Beef Checkoff, approximately 85% of beef in the U.S. comes from BQA-certified producers. The American Hereford Association (AHA) aims for that statistic to include 100% of AHA members. As highlighted at the 2022 Annual Meeting in Kansas City, Mo., AHA's 2022-2027 strategic plan includes documenting, communicating and improving Hereford's sustainability story.

"For the development and continuation of our sustainability story, we believe BQA is important to guide proper management and animal welfare practices," says Jack Ward, AHA executive vice president. "We want to make sure that we're doing things appropriately and be able to share that information with potential customers and consumers."

BQA certification plays an important role in AHA commercial marketing programs, such as the Hereford Advantage program. BQA provides a foundation for management practices and helps improve buyer confidence in your cattle.

"If you participate in the Hereford Advantage program, one of the requirements in that program is that you are BQA certified so we can document the fact that our producers are doing the right things in terms of vaccination, animal husbandry, animal health practices and animal welfare practices," Ward says. "As we begin to be more transparent with our consumers of Certified

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Hereford Beef[®], they need to understand that our membership is committed to those good practices.”

BQA certification provides peace of mind for both consumers and producers.

“When buyers see that somebody is BQA certified, they view those cattle as being handled properly,” Befort says. “Everybody can say that they have given two rounds of shots, but were those shots given properly so the vaccinations were as effective as possible? When buyers know that people have paid more attention to management and are doing things properly, I think that gives them the confidence to pay a little bit more for the cattle, hoping that they’ll perform better because they’ve been managed better.”

BQA certification adds value to your program, promotes continuous improvement in your operation, and helps protect and promote a positive consumer perception of beef. BQA courses allow producers to improve their management and herd health practices.

To enroll in an online course or find an in-person training, visit BQA.org.

“Now more than ever, it’s important to become BQA certified,” Mulvaney says. “It really is a value to our industry to be able to say, ‘as a producer, I voluntarily decided to become BQA certified.’ BQA — the right way is the only way.” **HW**

