Return on Investment for Beef Quality Assurance Certification

Amy E. Radunz (aradunz@wisc.edu)
UW Beef Cattle Extension Specialist, Dept. of Animal Science, UW-Madison

Animal agriculture is receiving greater scrutiny from its consumers, who are not only concerned about animal welfare but also food safety. The mission of the Beef Quality Assurance program is to maximize consumer confidence and acceptance of beef by focusing producers’ attention on daily production practices that influence the safety, wholesomeness, and quality of beef and beef products.

The beef quality assurance program is a voluntary program. Certification requirements for BQA in Wisconsin include the following steps:

1. Attend a training session by a Wisconsin BQA trainer
2. Complete the BQA certification test and personnel contract
3. Complete a valid Veterinary/Client Patient Relationship form

Certification is valid for three years and then producers must become recertified. The certification cost $15, which is used to cover supplies and administration costs.

What is the return on investment for becoming BQA certified?

Beef quality assurance incorporates topics, which are related to profitability of beef production. Guidelines for animal care, animal handling, proper storage and use of feeds, animal health products and practices, recording keeping, carcass quality, cattle marketing, biosecurity, and transportation provided by BQA can be used to improve production in all segments of the beef industry by either reducing costs or increasing value of cattle produced. Certification for BQA can also be a valuable marketing tool. Some branded beef and process-verified programs as well as feedlot have recognized the importance of BQA and provide premiums for cattle from producers who are BQA certified.

A series of National Quality Beef Audits, conducted by National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and Cattlemen’s Beef Board, have provided valuable information to the beef industry. The audits have demonstrated progress in quality of beef products over the past 20 years, however there are still improvements to be made. The 2005 National Beef Quality Audit indicated that total lost in value per head was $55.58 due to undesirable quality grade, yield grade, carcass weight, hide, and offal. The value lost could be recaptured if producers follow BQA guidelines. Recertification is also important to remain updated on advancements and information to make sound decision on production practices to increase value of beef.

A majority of beef producers are already following these guidelines, and producing safe, wholesome quality beef supply. However, there is still one more reason to become BQA certified and it is the most important. Certification of producers for BQA assures consumers that Wisconsin beef industry is providing a safe, wholesome food supply. This return on investment of BQA to consumers is hard to determine, but ultimately is priceless, because the beef industry cannot afford to lose consumer confidence and trust in its beef and beef products.

For More Information
Wisconsin Beef Information Center http://fyi.uwex.edu/wbic/
National Beef Quality Assurance Program http://www.bqa.org
2005 National Quality Beef Audit http://jas.fass.org/cgi/content/abstract/jas.2007-0782v1