



## Awareness of the Beef Quality Assurance Program Among Operators of Small<sup>1</sup> Feedlots

The Beef Quality Assurance program (BQA) has developed guidelines for producers in all phases of production to ensure the quality of beef and enhance consumer satisfaction. BQA covers a range of topics, from genetic selection to handling animals at harvest. The success of the BQA program depends on beef producers' awareness that they may impact beef quality downstream from their production segment. In addition, producers must manage their cattle in a manner that supports the end goals. One objective of the National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Feedlot 2011 study was to assess feedlot operators' awareness and perceptions of the BQA program.

The NAHMS Feedlot 2011 study provides an in-depth look at large feedlots (1,000 or more head capacity) in 12 States<sup>2</sup> and small feedlots (fewer than 1,000 head capacity) in 13 States.<sup>3</sup> Large feedlots accounted for 82.1 percent of the January 1, 2011, inventory of feedlot cattle in all U.S. feedlots but only 2.8 percent of all feedlots. The 12 participating States accounted for over 95 percent of the inventory of cattle in large feedlots (NASS "Cattle on Feed" report, February 18, 2011). Small feedlots accounted for 16.0 percent of the inventory in all U.S. feedlots and 92.9 percent of all U.S. farms with cattle on feed. The 13 participating States accounted for 85.4 percent of U.S. farms with fewer than 500 cattle on feed and 90.5 percent of the inventory on farms with fewer than 500 cattle on feed (NASS, 2007 Census of Agriculture). Study results presented in this information sheet reflect only small feedlots, which were divided into two groups: those with a capacity of 1 to 499 head and those with a capacity of 500 to 999 head. (For information on BQA awareness among operators of large feedlots, see "Quality Assurance on U.S. Feedlots, 2011," available at <http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov/feedlot>).

## Familiarity with the BQA program

An objective of the Feedlot 2011 study was to describe feedlot operators' familiarity with the BQA program and to describe their perceptions of the importance of management practices that may impact beef quality. Widespread awareness of the BQA program has been a goal of the beef industry for several years. Operators on 18.1 percent of feedlots with a capacity of fewer than 1,000 head were very familiar with the BQA program and 33.5 percent of operators characterized their awareness as "somewhat familiar" (table 1). Overall, 48.4 percent of operators of feedlots with fewer than 1,000 head capacity had only heard the name or were not familiar with the BQA program. The level of awareness was related to feedlot size. Operators of feedlots with 500 to 999 head capacity were much more likely to characterize themselves as "very familiar" (41.9 percent) compared with operators of feedlots with fewer than 500 head capacity (17.1 percent).

**Table 1. Percentage of feedlots by level of familiarity with either the State or the National Cattlemen's Beef Association BQA program, and by feedlot capacity and region**

Level	Percent Feedlots				
	Feedlot capacity (number head)		Region		All feedlots
	1–499	500–999	Central	Other	
	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.
Very familiar	17.1	41.9	24.1	15.9	18.1
Somewhat familiar	33.4	33.8	20.4	38.3	33.5
Heard of name only	19.6	15.7	12.2	22.1	19.4
Not familiar	29.9	8.6	43.3	23.7	29.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

## BQA training

Based on the level of awareness among operators of small feedlots it is not surprising that only 21.8 percent of feedlots with fewer than 1,000 head capacity reported having had someone from their operation attend a

<sup>1</sup> Feedlots with a capacity of fewer than 1,000 head.

<sup>2</sup> Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Washington

<sup>3</sup> Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin

national, State, or local BQA meeting or training session in the last 5 years.

## Importance of BQA practices

Perceptions of the importance of management practices can impact their implementation. Feedlot operators were asked to rate the importance of several BQA-related management practices. With the exception of implant strategy, the majority of operators of small feedlots thought the listed practices were very important for beef quality. Despite each of these practices being cited in the BQA guidelines, 35 to 40 percent of operators believed that the practices were not important for BQA or were not sure. The percentages of operators that believed the practices were not important or were unsure of their importance were substantially higher among those that were not familiar with the BQA program (table 2).

**Table 2. For feedlots in which the operator was *not familiar* with the BQA program, percentage of feedlots by importance operator placed on the following BQA practices**

Practice	Percent Feedlots				Total
	Importance				
	Very	Some- what	Not	Don't know	
Pct.	Pct.	Pct.	Pct.		
Location used for administration of injectable products (e.g., in neck, shoulder, side, or leg)	42.6	20.8	12.8	23.8	100.0
Route used for administration of injectable products (intramuscular, intravenous, subcutaneous)	40.8	17.4	17.1	24.8	100.0
Implanting strategy	14.5	9.2	42.6	33.7	100.0
Antibiotic selection to manage disease (e.g., type of FDA-approved antibiotic used or duration of action)	43.0	16.3	20.7	20.0	100.0
Residue avoidance	54.3	7.3	14.4	24.0	100.0

## Summary

The BQA program has worked hard to educate beef producers—along the continuum from cow-calf production through harvest—about the importance of

management practices in ensuring the best possible product to meet consumer expectations. Training modules have been developed to specifically address production segments such as cow-calf, feedlot, transportation, and harvest facilities. For the feedlot segment of production there is very high awareness of the BQA program and good acceptance of the importance of various management practices in BQA guidelines. From the data collected as part of the NAHMS Feedlot 2011 study it appears that there are education opportunities among operators of small feedlots regarding the components of the BQA program and the importance of management practices that can impact beef quality.

## References

- National BQA Manual. Available at:  
<http://www.bqa.org/CMDocs/bqa/NationalManual.pdf>  
 National Dairy BQA Producers Manual. Available at:  
<http://www.bqa.org/CMDocs/bqa/DairyBQAManual.pdf>  
 A Beef Producers Guide for Judicious Use of Antimicrobials in Cattle. Available at:  
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 Transportation Quality Assurance Program. Available at:  
<http://www.bqa.org/manuals.aspx>  
 Cattle Industry Guidelines for the Care and Handling of Cattle. Available at:  
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 BQA Stocker Self Assessment. Available at:  
[http://www.bqa.org/CMDocs/bqa/Stocker\\_Assessment.pdf](http://www.bqa.org/CMDocs/bqa/Stocker_Assessment.pdf)

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