

For many cattle producers one of the most pivotal questions they can ask is “Are my cattle reaching their full potential?” If not, what can be done differently to make the answer be “yes”? This week we will discuss a program that is used to help producers determine which management practices should be done, and how the chosen management steps impact cattle productivity and profitability of the operation.

The Beef Quality Assurance, BQA, program serves to provide producers with information about how husbandry techniques can be coupled with scientific knowledge to raise cattle under ideal management and environmental conditions. BQA first began as an effort to prevent the amount of chemical residues detected in marketed beef. Now, decades later, it maintains its original goals, but has expanded into a program that trains producers to take the necessary steps to improve quality and yield grades of beef carcasses.

In order to accomplish this, the BQA teaches producers the most stress-free, effective, and ultimately the most consumer friendly methods to use in the various management areas of their operations. These range from cow/calf handling to design of working facilities to injection site demonstrations. From a practical, and especially a consumer standpoint, these are extremely important topics. Increasing the practice of humane cattle handling and proper product administration in your cattle operation demonstrates a commitment to food safety and quality, and creates a safer product for consumers to enjoy. This also creates a better reputation for the beef cattle industry, which in turn improves the sale value of marketed beef cattle.

Two primary tools available to use to help fully understand the BQA concept are to become BQA certified, and to perform an assessment of the way your operation is managed. BQA certification is a relatively easy process that can be done on the internet. The management practices learned through the BQA certification process may be directly used on your own operation, and greatly aid in producing cattle that will reach their full potential. Assessments are important, as they promote continuous improvement if done accurately and if they are unbiased. When performed accurately, self assessments may be used as a measuring stick to compare where your operation is currently, and where you want it to be in the future. For BQA to be completely effective in an operation, each of the employees should commit themselves to learn the various facets of BQA. We recommend that each worker- from the owner to the ranch hands, and anyone in between, become BQA certified and display behavior that exhibits their understanding of the important role that BQA has in their cattle operation.

Beef Quality Assurance improves productivity of cattle by ensuring that they are handled and vaccinated in the most effective and humane ways possible. Beef Quality Assurance also results in safer meat for consumers, and a greater reputation for the beef industry. This is important for beef cattle producers to keep in mind because when they raise cattle to be the best they can be they are also helping their operation to be the best it can be. For more information about BQA, or to become BQA certified, please visit [bqa.org](http://bqa.org).