

Pennsylvania Department Of Agriculture Gives Grant For Beef Quality Program

MIDDLETOWN (Dauphin Co.) — Producer education about beef quality assurance has been ongoing in Pennsylvania since the first National Beef Quality Audit a decade ago. Quality issues cost the beef industry millions each year, resulting in average losses to producers of \$277 per animal. Surveys have shown that a majority of consumers are concerned about beef quality and safety, and that 22.3 percent of beef users say they resort to other protein sources more regularly because of quality and safety issues.

Because reversing these economic losses and strengthening consumer demand are so important to the future of Pennsylvania's beef industry, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture recently awarded matching funds of up to \$36,000 to the Pennsylvania Beef Council — for a total budget of \$72,000 directed to the promotion of beef quality and safety in Pennsylvania.

This project has three primary objectives: 1) to determine BQA guidelines that fit beef producers in Pennsylvania; 2) to train, certify, and recognize beef producers who adopt and maintain BQA guidelines and best management practices; and 3) to promote Pennsylvania beef quality and safety to Pennsylvania consumers.

With this program, Pennsylvania will join the ranks of 15 other states which already have nationally recognized BQA certification programs in place.

An advisory committee, comprised of cattle feeders, packer representatives, cooperative extension, and allied industry representatives will assist in developing the criteria for implementing the program. Using the minimum BQA standards of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and considering what other states have accomplished, the advisory committee will make recommendations that reflect the needs of Pennsylvania producers.

The program will be coordi-

nated by the Pennsylvania Beef Council, represented on the advisory committee by Executive Director Paul Slayton, with assistance from Penn State Beef Specialist Dr. John Comerford and Pennsylvania Director of Beef Quality Assurance Certification Wendall Landis, who also spearheads the Pennsylvania Blueprint for Success.

"We wanted producer involvement and a variety of cattle feeders to gather different ideas, because we want this to be your program," Landis explains.

Adds Comerford, "Food safety and quality issues will end up on the producer's lap. The purpose of this program is to address these issues to remain self-regulated in these areas."

While this program is voluntary, the concept is similar to the Pork Quality Assurance Program which has now been made mandatory by many pork processors who will only accept hogs from PQA certified producers. Already in the Midwest, it has been reported that at least one large beef processor began issuing letters that "strongly encourage" feedlots to adopt specific BQA guidelines in their production and management of cattle processed at their plants.

Drew Wilkins, head cattle buyer for Taylor Packing Company in Wyalusing, Pa. notes that "food safety is a major issue. We want to work together with producers to get away from these issues that drive the industry crazy."

To become a Pennsylvania BQA Certified Producer, cattle feeders will need to complete a two-pronged education program. In addition to receiving a practical BQA how-to handbook, the certification program will include a BQA awareness training session with a brief, general pre- and post-test, followed by a hands-on chute-side demonstration and participation session.

Certified producers will also agree to implement the checklist of Beef Quality Assurance practices on their farms. After completing the program, producers

would receive a certificate of completion as well as ear tags or back tags to identify their cattle as coming from a Pennsylvania Certified Producer. The farm would also receive an attractive farmstead sign with the Pennsylvania BQA Certification Program logo, proclaiming the farm as a Pennsylvania Certified Producer.

The project also includes funds earmarked for retail beef surveys to discern Pennsylvania consumer attitudes toward BQA Certified beef products. Working with packers and retailers, it is hoped that eventually beef from BQA — Certified producers could be identified in the meat case.

"The primary thing that is different about this project, compared with past BQA education efforts, is that we're organizing the education in a more structured way, recognizing those producers who are doing these things, identifying cattle from the certified producers, and identifying consumer attitudes about the product,"

Comerford explains.

Lancaster County cattle feeder Karl Hess notes that "the veal and pork industries are already doing this and those processors are mandating it. As beef producers, the economic incentive for doing this can be found in avoiding quality discounts and avoiding the 'you've got a problem' phone call from the packer."

Record-keeping is probably the most difficult portion of any BQA program for producers to implement on their farms. Through the Blueprint for Success and the Penn State Cooperative Extension, resources are available to assist producers in developing the kind of record-keeping that will not only aid in beef quality assurance efforts but also protect the producer as the food industry, in general, moves toward farm to fork product identification.

Because beef feedlots handle more animals, are the coordinating segment of the industry, and are the last producer to manage the animal before processing,

this voluntary certification program is being directed first toward cattle feeders.

Cow/calf producers, backgrounders, sale barns and order buyers should also be using BQA guidelines for handling and treating cattle, and they can become certified by participating in the program. In fact, as the project evolves and more states adopt such programs, certified cattle feeders will want to buy calves and yearlings from certified suppliers so that their efforts toward assuring beef quality are not compromised by the producer or market entity which produced, managed or handled the cattle before the cattle feeder receives them.

The BQA Producer Certification training will take place in several locations in Pennsylvania from late January through April, 2001. To find out more, contact Wendall Landis, Pennsylvania Director of BQA Certification, at (717) 702-2015, or the Pennsylvania Beef Council at (717) 939-7000.

Dairy Stakeholder's 2000 Viability Conference Set



CHAMBERSBURG (Cumberland Co.) - Are you committed to the viability of the PA Dairy Industry? Do you know what it takes to compete with the top dairy states? Want to hear some progressive ideas? Then make your plans now to attend the 2000 Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders' Conference, "Moving PA's Dairy Industry" scheduled for December 13 and 14, 2000 at the Holiday Inn

Grantville, PA. The planning committee has successfully developed a program to stimulate thinking on how Pennsylvanians can lead the way to being more progressive and more competitive in all aspects of the industry.

Producers, suppliers, processors, educators, regulators and marketers will find the program inspiring and educational. Panel discussions that include producers, processors and other professionals will provide opportunity for everyone to actively participate in the conference.

A sampling of the speakers and topics include: Ed Wilgenburg, a 3000+ head dairy producer from Bakersfield, CA will speak on: "The Competition Has Low Input and High Production" and

"Applying Wall Street Business Concepts to the Dairy"; nationally known Don Ault from Sparks Companies, Inc. will speak on "Improving Competitiveness - Are costs or revenues the real challenge?" and Helen Bishop McDonald from Dairy Farmers of Canada will entertain and educate with her presentation, "Eat these words: Promoting Dairy Nutrition to the Public." Plus hear dairy producers, Phil Kulp, of Martinsburg, David Pool of Robesonia and Richard Waybright of Gettysburg share their insight on being competitive and progressive.

Everyone involved in the Pennsylvania dairy industry should attend this conference to

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