



## Beef Quality Assurance: Blueprint for Success

**Good animal husbandry, known in today's world as animal welfare, is at the very core of the industry's nationally coordinated and state implemented quality assurance program.**

By Kim Holt  
Photo courtesy Kempfer Cattle Co.

From discerning consumers who want to enjoy beef "guilt free" to animal activists who try to create doubt about our food and those

who produce it, the dynamics are complex in today's food production system. At the very core of animal agriculture, however, is something that both producers and veterinarians engage in and

can improve upon each and every day, and that is animal welfare.



### Doing the Right Thing

"Animal welfare is animal husbandry," reminds Dr. Dan Thomson, director of the Beef Cattle Institute at the Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

It's the understanding that animal welfare improves not only the health and productivity of an animal, he says, but more than likely an operation's profitability.

"The other reason we promote animal welfare is because it's the right thing to do."

Thomson says that animal welfare is providing nutrition, shelter, preventative medicine and doing what is best to raise a healthy, well-cared-for animal in an ever-changing environment. But these practices are not one size fits all.

"Animal welfare practices are a farm-by-farm, rancher-by-rancher and animal-by-animal decision. It is something that we as producers and veterinarians are engaged with every day. Receiving continuing education and documenting practices on the farm and ranch are important for us all as we continue to improve our industry." In doing so, he encourages both producers and veterinarians, alike, to incor-

porate Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) into their practices. At every opportunity, Thomson encourages producers to work with their local veterinarian, making sure this professional also sets foot on the farm to foster knowledge and understanding for the client's program.

"The heart and soul of the BQA program starts with a valid veterinary-client-patient relationship. Whether involving castration methods, dehorning techniques, herd health, or nutrition recommendations, the beef veterinarian is central to helping producers and ranchers continue to stay abreast of animal health and well-being practices."

Thomson points out, "When combined with a veterinary relationship, it is what the consumer desires for assurance of our farm animals' well-being and safety of our food. BQA started out as the quality assurance of beef products and has evolved into the assurance of quality beef for the consumer."

### BQA's Evolution

In existence since 1986, Beef Quality Assurance is a nationally coordinated, state implemented program that involves training for best management practices in beef production. It originated as a beef safety program for antibiotic residue avoidance. This was followed by a national injection site producer education effort, which led to the formation of BQA programs in many states for outreach to farmers and ranchers.

In 2006, a national BQA program came into being to help provide consistency of program information between states. Food safety and antibiotic residue avoidance remain the cornerstones of this program, but it also involves animal welfare and best management practices.

The most recent expansion of the industry's quality assurance program, developed through the Beef Checkoff, is the creation of cow-calf, stocker and feedlot self-assessment tools for verifying and documenting animal husbandry practices at the grassroots level. (see [www.BQA.org/Resources](http://www.BQA.org/Resources))

"Total quality management for beef quality assurance, which BQA is founded on, is about continuous improvement," says Ryan Ruppert, senior director of Beef Quality Assurance for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). We're never at our destination; we can always do better in the creation of a better, safer food product for the consumer, he says.

### Focused on Improvement

An award that promotes beef quality assurance in all segments of the industry is the National BQA Award, presented annually since 2009. A beef, dairy and marketer award recognizes producers that best

demonstrate animal care and handling principles as part of the day-to-day activities on their respective operations.

Entrants must have a strong desire to continually improve BQA on their operations, while encouraging others to implement the producer education program. This requirement fits the 2013 winners, Billy, Reed, Henry and George Kempfer of Kempfer Cattle Co., Deer Park, Fla., to the tee.

The Kempfers are one of eight founding members of Florida Heritage Beef LLC (FHB), a group of cow-calf producers who have aligned to pool and market quality Florida feeder calves (see story on page 1).

One of the founding guidelines of this group is each FHB member-ranch's cow crew must be BQA certified. This quality assurance program is important to this group who includes two national BQA award winners: the Kempfer family and Lykes Bros., Inc., Okeechobee, Fla., the 2011 NCBA's BQA Award winner.

At the age of 18, Billy, Henry and George Kempfer's father, started running this family-owned ranch with his brother, Reed. Billy says they started by making improvements in fertility and then quality.

The sixth generation is now working this Central Florida ranch, which has been in business since 1898. Commercial cattle have been a focus for more than 100 years.

According to the Kempfers, cattle are selected for fertility, fleshing ability on low quality forage, capacity, excellent udder quality, and gentle disposition with strong emphasis on carcass traits.

"Producing beef is our business, and we feel all of these traits are important in selecting profitable cattle," they say.

According to Henry, his family is "very particular" with the herd's health and its timing for both their cows and calves. All preconditioning of their calves is done preweaning, before they are shipped directly off the cow in late summer. Retained ownership and buyer-feedback have all shown high marks for their health program, which includes modified live vaccines.

"One of the big issues with BQA is it's not just how we give shots and where to give them, but it's also how cattle are handled," Henry points out.

"The Kempfers are very proactive when it comes to their health program with their cows and calves," says Clint Barthle, DVM. "I think they exemplify what BQA is all about." He adds, "BQA is really everybody's job, from the time that calf hits the ground to the time of harvest. By adhering to BQA guidelines, you're safeguarding beef."

The Kempfers strive to raise moderate framed cattle with growth, muscle and doability. They've continued to make changes and improve through quality genetics, individual recordkeeping, good mineral and herd health programs and forage management.

"No matter how good your cattle may be or how good a job you're doing, there's going to be a way to improve somewhere, and it's important to not become complacent with what you're doing," George says.

"We make a living off of the cattle," Henry relays, "and

if we don't treat them right and take care of them, they're not going to produce for us to their maximum potential."

Reed adds, "It's an honor to be able to receive this award. It's something we've worked for; everything we do, we try to do it right and the correct way. It's just something the whole family should be very proud of, which we are."

### Become BQA Certified

Education and certification for today's BQA program is offered in all 50 states to producers and veterinarians through face-to-face meetings in cooperation with state cattlemen's groups. Or, there is a national online BQA program, available in both English and Spanish, at [www.AnimalCareTraining.org](http://www.AnimalCareTraining.org).

A series of 10-15 audiovisual training modules, five to seven minutes in length, cover topics such as animal husbandry, animal welfare, environmental stewardship and food safety practices. Successful completion of a series of these modules leads to BQA certification, complete with an electronically mailed certificate.

Thomson points out that the BQA programs are basically at a very low or no cost to producers through their investment in the Beef Checkoff.

"The No. 1 reason to use Beef Quality Assurance is so that we understand we are doing the best that we can to produce a wholesome, safe food supply and are humanely raising our cattle as we produce that beef for our consumers," he summarizes.



Family members accepting their National BQA Award at the 2013 National Cattlemen's Beef Association Convention are, from left, Reed, Billy, Henry and George Kempfer of Kempfer Cattle Co., Deer Park, Fla.