

ASSURANCE FOR ALL

Beef Quality Assurance adds resources for added transparency, progress in raising beef.

Today, it's commonplace to go to a restaurant or grocery store and see imagery of ranchers and cattle surrounding beef products. When taking a bite of a steak, there's almost zero concern for the product's taste and safety.

But that wasn't always the case. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the industry faced significant scrutiny over carcass quality during harvest.

Around this same period, the release of the paper "Lost Opportunities for the Beef Cattle Industry" by National Cattlemen's Beef Association economist Chuck Lambert, marked a pivotal turning point for beef quality. The paper revealed significant financial losses due to poor management practices.

Josh White, Senior Executive Director of Producer Education and Sustainability at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), recalls the growing awareness that prompted industry leaders to reconsider standard management practices for that time. "We were looking at, 'What are we doing on the live animal side that's causing problems further down the line, and how can we improve it?'" White explains.

Organizations like the Texas Cattle Feeders Association, Kansas Livestock Association and major universities — such as Kansas State University,

Oklahoma State University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln — spearheaded efforts to improve beef quality. Their work coincided with the formation of the National Beef Checkoff, which helped fund the development of safety programs aimed at addressing carcass quality, namely within the feedyard sector. Findings from both the USDA Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Nebraska, and Colorado State University demonstrated that tenderness in primal cuts was negatively impacted by injection site blemishes. According to White, these collective efforts "snowballed" into what would become the foundation of the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program.

By 1992, the first official National Beef Quality Audits were released, followed by another in 1994, establishing a precedent for releasing updated audits every five years. These audits became a cornerstone of the BQA program, providing a framework for improving beef production from the ground up.

As the industry embraced BQA, its impact extended beyond safety concerns to economic benefits. In fact, the NCBA recently partnered with CattleFax on a cow-calf management report entitled "Right Way, Right Time," which incorporates data from these audits and quantifies

the financial value of better management practices.

Today, BQA certification has become an industry standard. Major packers now require cattle to be sourced from BQA-compliant



Josh White



Josh White serves as the Senior Executive Director - Producer Education & Sustainability for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), a role he's been in for more than a decade.

Josh and his team work to capitalize on the rich histories of the Beef Quality Assurance, Masters of Beef Advocacy, Environmental Stewardship Award Program, Stockmanship & Stewardship, and Cattlemen's College programs while moving these initiatives forward to deliver even greater value to the cattle industry. He also provides leadership for NCBA's policy funded sustainability efforts and supports beef checkoff funded efforts associated with sustainable cattle production.

Before joining NCBA, Josh served as the Executive Director of the Georgia Cattlemen's Association and Georgia Beef Board. He continues to own cattle on a family farm in Georgia. Josh and his wife, Erin, reside in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. They are proud parents of three children and were recently blessed with their first grandchild.

feedyards, and brands like *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB) integrate BQA principles in communicating the safety and quality of its products to licensees.

In 2019, U.S. Premium Beef required that all fed cattle come from BQA-certified sources. Looking to the future, organizations such as the American Hereford Association are planning for 100% of its seedstock breeders to be BQA-certified, further embedding these standards into the beef industry.

Marketing Beef with BQA

The BQA program also plays a vital role in marketing beef to consumers through campaigns like "Beef. It's What's for Dinner." White highlights a recent series of videos that featured Kansas ranchers, Kansas BQA Coordinator Clayton Huseman and other BQA leaders marking the first time BQA messaging has been so prominently included in consumer-facing content.

"That's the first time we've been that forward — putting a strong BQA narrative into consumer messaging," he says.

The results were impressive, with consumer trust in the industry's stewardship practices increasing by 40% after watching the 30-second videos. Each video garnered more than 4 million views, with some approaching the 5 million mark. Viewership was measured by each time a video was watched in entirety from start to finish.

White sees this as a powerful testament to the public's interest in how cattle are raised. "That narrative really moved the needle," he affirms. "BQA creates a lot of transparency for our industry to be able to say, 'Here's the program. Here are people that are doing it. If you're skeptical, go explore it.'"

Industry and BQA

BQA is also playing a leadership role in biosecurity, an increasingly critical issue for beef producers. White recommends producers start with the biosecurity resources available through BQA, including a biosecurity template that provides step-by-step guidance. From there, producers can explore the Secure Beef Supply Plan, which provides more comprehensive strategies for managing biosecurity risks.

BQA also embraces technology that improves recordkeeping and often works with U.S. CattleTrace on educational efforts to ensure the integrity of the beef supply chain. White notes that human error continues to be a major factor in residue violations, particularly when it comes to record keeping. "Using electronic ID does take out some human error," he says. "For folks who have incorporated electronic ID, I haven't heard anybody say they wanted to go back."

BQA's efforts are supported primarily by the Beef Checkoff, although the program has increasingly attracted funding from federal grants and outside partners. Recently, the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) awarded NCBA funds to develop content in Spanish, broadening the program's reach. BQA also collaborates regularly with the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) on international initiatives to promote beef safety, and it was recently recognized for meeting the ISO standard for cattle welfare, underpinning BQA's good standing in international beef production.

Getting Certified

BQA certification is available through two methods: in-person training or online courses. While both options are effective, White encourages producers to consider attending an in-person session whenever possible. "Some states offer a sort of continuing education credit, where you can attend multiple shorter events and collect hours, kind of like you do with a pesticide applicator's license," he says. These in-person sessions, led by authorized trainers, last between one to two hours and provide a hands-on learning experience.

For those unable to attend in person, an online certification is available through BQA.org. This course can be taken at any time, with the ability to start and pause as needed. On average, it takes about two to three hours to complete.

The recently updated BQA website also offers a range of helpful resources, including biosecurity planning guides and record-keeping tools, along with listings of in-person certification events by state.

Certification is tailored to various sectors of the beef industry, including cow-calf, stocker-backgrounder and feedyard operations. Additionally, certification must be renewed every three years, and for those looking to build upon their foundational knowledge, BQA offers continuing education courses online as well. These modules delve deeper into topics such as biosecurity, stockmanship, and herd health operational management, with each module earning one credit toward recertification. A total of three credits is required every three years to maintain certification.

A BQA transportation certification is also available as part of the continuing education program. Although primarily designed for cattle haulers, White notes that anyone interested in improving their knowledge of cattle

transportation is welcome to complete the module, which provides two credits toward recertification. An active BQA certification and user account in the national BQA platform is required to access continuing education modules.

As the beef industry keeps building transparency, BQA is at the forefront, guiding producers in best practices and ensuring that quality and safety remain top priorities. Through its certification programs, marketing efforts, and leadership in biosecurity, BQA is helping to keep beef on the table. ♦

BQA Resources

- Find a **BQA training near you**, and your state BQA coordinator's contact information:
www.bqa.org/beef-quality-assurance-certification/in-person-training
- Follow **@NationalBQA** on YouTube:
www.youtube.com/@NationalBQA
- Access **BQA resources**:
www.bqa.org/resources/landing
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