By Chase DeCoite, Associate Director, BQA

From high school sweethearts to couple and business partners, Todd and Kristi Drake of Nodaway, Iowa, are a team with a very unique story, which starts in, and returns to, Iowa. Their steadfastness to remain progressive and innovative is matched by their determination to always look at the best in every situation and learn from their mistakes.

The Drakes’ teamwork approach was evident from the start of their feedyard in 2000. Todd started out hand feeding cattle for their backgrounding operation, packing 400 feed buckets each day. As a reflection of Todd’s hardworking reputation, a number of area beef producers pledged to work with Todd to custom feed their cattle in a win-win situation for both parties.

This allowed the Drakes to plan their feedyard around specified regulations. Continuous advancements have protected the environment, improved cattle performance, and enhanced animal welfare for the family’s operation. These on-farm improvements have helped demonstrate to surrounding producers how to effectively implement BQA on the farm.

Today, the entire team at Nodaway Valley Feeders plays an important role in implementing the Beef Quality Assurance program on their feedyard. All of the employees at the operation are BQA Certified and go through quarterly trainings with their herd veterinarian Dr. Kip Lukasewicz. As a result of these meetings, the team has implemented additional Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and perform all aspects of the BQA Feedyard Assessment. The Drakes use the assessment to continually improve and serve as the basis for necessary daily improvements.

BQA practices at Nodaway Valley Feeders are focused on doing the right thing for the animal. They believe in weekly box scraping of pens; collecting data to make management decisions; collecting bunk scores, feeding, and recording all feed calls on a laptop in their pickup at the same time each and every day; feeding cattle three times a day on time, at the same time, dry-rolling corn for better nutrient uptake by cattle; daily riding of pens by horseback; providing adequate bunk, water and floor space for all animals; having sprinklers in the pens for periods of heat stress; and providing big mounds for additional air flow.

“BQA to our crew is how everything is done on the entire operation,” said Todd Drake. “We want to be good stewards of the land, and we want to make sure our neighbors view us as someone beneficial to the community. Our standard form of measure is that we should be able to give a surprise tour at any given time.”

The Drakes have not only embraced BQA because it’s the right thing to do, but because it’s the only way to accomplish producing safe, healthy, and wholesome beef and build consumer trust in the product. Vital to making Nodaway Valley Feeders sustainable is the daily implementation of low stress cattle handling practices, proper acclimation of newly arriving cattle, and focusing on employee training. Their team-like approach and dedication to Beef Quality Assurance earned Nodaway Valley Feeders the 2016 BQA Feedyard Award, announced at the Cattle Industry Convention in San Diego earlier this year.

Feedyards and beef producers of all segments of the industry are encouraged to participate in BQA. Free online training courtesy of Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc., is available through April 15. It’s easy to get started by visiting www.BQA.org.