National Beef Quality Audit: What is it? Why do we do it?

By Jesse Fulton, Associate Director, Producer Education

The Beef Checkoff funded National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) has been carried out every five years since 1991. The goal of the 1991 NBQA was “To conduct a quality audit of slaughter steers/ heifers for the U.S. beef industry in 1991, establishing baselines for present quality shortfalls and identifying targets for desired quality levels by the year 2001.”

The audit allows us to measure and manage meat quality challenges, provides us with an industry-wide scorecard and captures lost opportunities that allows for continuous improvement. Although the fed heifer/steer audit captures the largest portion of the beef supply chain, it was determined that a portion of the beef supply chain was not being captured – the market cows and bulls that enter the beef supply chain. Therefore, the first market cow and bull audit was conducted in 1994.

The NBQA is conducted in three different phases. Phase I determines how each beef production and market sector (feeders, packers, retailers, foodservice operators, and allied industry/government employees) defines seven different quality categories (how and where the cattle were raised; lean and fat and bone; weight and size; cattle genetics; how and where the cattle were raised; lean and fat and bone; weight and size; cattle genetics) through a process that entered the beef supply chain. Phase II assesses the current status of quality and consistency of U.S. fed steers and heifers by conducting harvest floor and cooler audits by collecting quality and yield grade characteristics, as well as instrument grading information. Finally, Phase III is a strategy workshop in which representatives from each segment of the industry meet to review results of the research phases and discuss their implications for the U.S. beef industry. A strategy developed at this meeting provides the industry a blueprint and goals for the direction the industry should go for the next five years.

In 2016 both the fed heifer/steer and market cow/bull audits were conducted simultaneously. Data from the fed heifer/steer NBQA will be released and presented at the 2017 Cattle Industry Summer Business meeting in Denver, Colo., from July 12-15. Although the NBQA data will not be presented until the Summer Business meeting, producers can learn more about the NBQA process at the BQA Producer Forum on Thursday, Feb. 2 from 11 a.m. -12:30 p.m. during the Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn. The forum is open to all cattle producers and BQA stakeholders. Market cow and bull audit data will be presented at a later date.

Stockmanship and Stewardship: Old Hat, New Frontier

Cattlemen are aware of the benefits of low-stress cattle handling, but all too often unsure how to implement those techniques on their own operations. NCBA’s Stockmanship and Stewardship program has reached countless beef producers to answer that exact question, and many have successfully implemented those techniques on their own operations. Now, with support from Boehringer-Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc., the program is set to reach new heights. Beginning this year Stockmanship and Stewardship will be increasing the number and scope of events that are held across the country to reach cattlemen in all corners of the United States.

The same clinicians that producers have come to know and love will continue to be the focal point of a multifaceted and hands-on learning experience. Curt Pate has been conducting demonstrations and clinics for more than a decade and will continue to entertain and educate audiences with his personal stories and innovative mindset. Ron Gill is a renowned stockman and animal scientist for Texas Agrilife Extension who captivates the attention of cattlemen with his credibility as a rancher and ability to relate to his audience. Both Pate and Gill will continue to be an integral part of an expanding program.

Local events will continue to be held but the program is excited to be able to grow and offer new multi-day events that are sure to attract cattlemen from a larger region at a central location. These new events will include a suite of educational opportunities for cattle producers, including local extension representatives, industry leaders, and government agencies. With so much to offer, the Stockmanship and Stewardship program is making its way as a “must attend” venue for cattlemen and women to learn from the best and network with fellow producers who are applying these innovative strategies on their own operations.

For more information and to find an event near you, visit www.StockmanshipandStewardship.org.