Program benefits beef producers

It was not that long ago that most people had a connection to a farm, whether it be their parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles.

Today, it is not uncommon for an individual to have no connection. This lack of connection has allowed misinformation about Midwest agriculture to creep into media channels.

This misinformation is particularly a problem for the livestock industry. Activist groups attempt to push their agendas, playing on the ignorance of many consumers. Terms such as sustainability, all natural, homegrown, happy animals, organically raised, GMO-free are loosely used, adding to the confusion.

Large retailers and buyer groups concerned about social media negativity have responded to the activist agenda by demanding that suppliers prove the meat being sold to them will satisfy consumer concerns about animal health and environmental stewardship.

Suppliers have now demanded that the livestock being purchased from local producers will comply with some form of "quality assurance" program. These demands have now trickled down to our area.

After the first of the year, the few remaining livestock sale yards in our area will only purchase cattle from producers that have completed a certified quality assurance program.

To meet this demand, the Hancock County office of Ohio State University Extension will be offering a certified "Beef Quality Assurance" program.

The program will be from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 29 at the Hancock County Agricultural Service Center, 7868 County Road 140, Findlay.

Garth Ruff, Extension educator from Henry County and a certified Beef Quality Assurance instructor, will lead the program.

The program is free to the public. Individuals attending will fulfill their certification requirements.

What is Beef Quality Assurance? BQA is a nationally-coordinated, state-implemented program that provides information to U.S. beef producers and beef consumers about how common sense husbandry techniques can be coupled with accepted scientific knowledge to raise cattle under optimum management and environmental conditions.

BQA is certainly not a new program. The precursor to BQA, "Beef Safety Assurance," originated in the late 1970s and through the 1980s emphasized targeting real and perceived beef safety issues.

Today's BQA addresses the concerns of modern consumers, such as livestock production practices, animal health, and the sustainability of food production.

How important is the voice of the consumer? Consumer demands have caused large meat buyers such as Tyson and Wendy's to both announce that beginning in 2019, they will be only buying beef from Beef Quality Assurance certified producers.

BQA certification will also make sure that beef producers know the best management practices that improve both quality grades and yield grades of beef carcasses.

USDA Quality Grading is a composite evaluation of factors including carcass maturity, firmness, texture, color, and fat distribution, called grading, in the meat.

These factors affect the palatability and taste of the meat.

USDA Yield Grading shows differences in the total yield of retail cuts. Yield grades estimate the amount of boneless, closely trimmed retail cuts from the high-value parts of the carcass — the round, loin, rib, and chuck. If the beef industry produces a quality beef product, it can meet consumers' expectations for eating and preparation characteristics.

The government is also the beef industry's partner in this process by providing inspection services that help ensure a safe and wholesome product that is correctly labeled and packaged.

While the target audience for BQA educational programs is the producer, the ultimate priority is today's consumer. In addition to helping the producer add value to market animals, BQA can help build a positive public image and instill consumer confidence in the beef industry.

BQA is much more than knowing the proper way for animal care. Quality also includes the whole beef production system, such as management decisions relating to herd health, nutrition, animal handling, reproduction, genetics, and marketing.

The certification process will ensure consumers that beef producers are raising animals in a healthy and sustainable environment, and that products being sold are a safe and nutritional protein source.

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Lenz can be heard with Vawn Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXX-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.