

2011 National Beef Quality Audit

Significant Findings



All Sector Findings (Phase I)

- **No Two Market Sectors Define Quality the Same Way.** This suggests a discontinuity in economic signals. For example, sectors closer to the consumer place greater importance on traits connected with social values (animal well-being, sustainable production), yet price-per-pound remains the sole market signal throughout the chain.
- **Increased Transparency Is a Must.** The industry must do a better job of “telling its story” to the public. Consumers want to know the story behind their beef, including
 - how cattle feed affects the beef product
 - accessibility of health and management records
 - accessibility of age and source verification
 - accessibility of third party audits documenting humane handling practices.“How and Where the Cattle Were Raised” had the greatest odds of being considered a “non-negotiable requirement” by all sectors.
- **Increased Importance of Food Safety and Eating Satisfaction across All Sectors.**
 - The importance of Food Safety is increasing for packers, foodservice, and retailers (sectors closest to consumers).
 - Eating Satisfaction is the only attribute for which packers, foodservice, and retailers are willing to pay a premium. All beef sectors most frequently define Eating Satisfaction as being related to tenderness and flavor.
- **Additional Opportunities.** Producing beef with ideal lean:fat ratios and managing cattle and carcass weights to create more uniform, consistent products are areas with potential to add value.

Packer Sector Findings (Phase II)

- **Individual Animal ID.** Almost all cattle coming into the packing plant are identified, with a numerical increase in those individually identified with visual tags (50.6%) compared to the 2005 NBQA (38.7%).
- **Increased Awareness of the Importance of Animal Handling.** The number of bruises on cattle entering the plant is decreased from the number in the 2005 NBQA.
- **Increased Hot Carcass Weights.** Hot carcass weights are increasing (825 lbs. for NBQA 2011 vs. 793 lbs. for NBQA 2005), and 95.1% of carcasses range between 600 and 1,000 lbs.
- **Increased Availability of Prime and Choice.** The percentage of Prime and Choice is at a 20-year high (61.1% for NBQA 2011 vs. 54.5% for NBQA 2005).

- **Increased Percentage of Conforming Carcasses.** Carcasses meeting targets of U.S. Select or higher and USDA yield grades 1 – 3 total 85.1% compared to 81.7% in NBQA 2005.
- **Human and Instrument Grading Are Aligned.** Cattle of comparable average carcass weight showed surprisingly similar measurements on ribeye area, adjusted fat thickness, USDA yield grade and marbling scores whether assessed by human graders or by camera.

Producer Sector Findings (Phase III)

- **Healthy Cattle Equal Quality.** To cattle producers, quality equals “raising healthy cattle and calves” and “producing safe and wholesome beef.”
 - Ninety-six percent of producer respondents believe they can influence quality via activities such as preventative health care.
 - Ninety percent of producers have a working relationship with their veterinarian. Though 95% had some level of routine vaccination and treatment protocols, only 31% had a written plan. Greater emphasis must be placed on documentation.
- **Injection Site Improvements.** BQA and its educators should be credited for the drop in injection-site lesions since the first audit in 1991. However, improvement is still needed, particularly within the dairy segment, with 41% of dairy producers still giving injections in the animal’s rump.
- **Low-Stress Handling Is a Priority.** Use of good stockmanship and animal-handling skills is the producer’s #1 method of intentionally influencing quality. Ninety-eight percent do not use an electric prod as their primary driving tool.
- **BQA Is becoming widespread.** Eighty-seven percent of respondents say they have heard of BQA and 71% have attended a BQA training or completed an online training. Receiving a premium for following BQA protocols is an ideal.
- **Identification and Traceability.** Seventy-eight percent of respondents used individual animal ID (ear tag) as a means to keep track of withdrawal times for animal health products.



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