

Quality Care Matters

A Column about Beef & Dairy Animal Care



Producers Find Their Niche Direct Marketing Beef

In this month's *Quality Care Matters*, we meet three Pennsylvania producers who've found success direct marketing their beef to customers. Learn more about their efforts and how they use the beef quality assurance (BQA) program as a promotional tool.

Dave McElhane, Beaver County, (www.familyfarmbeef.com) traces his family's marketing efforts back 75 years to his great grandparents who began selling beef on the hoof, quarters, halves, and at retail. In the past five years, McElhane has focused his efforts in the following areas — three seasonal outdoor farm markets, two CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs, a brick and mortar family-owned farm market and one restaurant — the Sewickley Country Club.

"We market our beef as premium dry aged beef," said McElhane. "We dry age a minimum of 17 days, using a green diet of stored forages and roasted barley and oats. We don't use hormones and don't feed antibiotics to our cattle, making it a natural product," he noted. For those customers that need further assurance, McElhane explains that they DNA test their herd sires for marbling, tenderness and docility, another trait with high correlation to tenderness.

McElhane believes the PA Preferred and BQA programs are important selling points with his customers and uses complimentary BQA freezer beef labels from the Beef Council. "In the public's mind, it (BQA logo) clearly means it is better beef," McElhane explained. "I can tell our customers about our animal husbandry practices, environmental stewardship, and humane handling systems."

Business is brisk for McElhane, with about two to four referrals a week from their customers. "I think our customers keep coming back, and bring new customers, because of our consistent quality and our family's story," noted McElhane.

Phoebe Bitler, Vista Grande Farm, Berks County, also is a long-time direct marketer, selling beef for more than 30 years. For Bitler, the local, know your farmer message resonates with her customers. "They appreciate our customer service and the quality beef we produce," she said. New to packaging her



beef with the BQA label, Bitler thinks "it will help our customers understand the value when they begin seeing the stickers." She continued, "We take time to answer our customers' questions about how we raise cattle and what we feed them."

Like McElhane and Bitler, Bob Hay, too, has more than 25 years of direct marketing under his belt. In the past six years, however, Hay has participated in the Somerset Farmer's Market. "Our customers love that our beef is local and that we don't feed hormones or antibiotics," Hay said. "We are always getting compliments on the taste and quality." With plenty of repeat and referral business, his customers are happy.

While Hay does not use the BQA label on his beef, he is a long-time BQA advocate. "We started implementing the practices that BQA teaches and promotes back in the early 70s," he said. "Our veterinarian, Dr. David Welch, started telling us to do a lot of the practices that BQA requires for certification. The training, demonstrations, and the BQA manual all verify what our vet told us many years ago."

Hay explains that since he started participating in the Somerset County Farmer's Market, he can answer questions people have about the issues they see on TV or read in the news. "It gives us a great opportunity to tell them our story about farming and how much we care about our livestock, our land, and our families," Hay said. "It gives us a chance to remind them that we are stewards of our land and livestock. We also pass out a lot of information, including recipes and how to prepare beef."

To learn more about using the BQA labels to market your beef, contact Nichole Hockenberry, BQA Director, at 1-888-4BEEF-PA or nhockenberry@pabeef.org.

BQA Training Scheduled

Please visit www.pa-bqa.org for more details on these upcoming trainings, a contact Nichole Hockenberry at nhockenberry@pabeef.org or 888-4BEEFPA. The training dates are as follows:

Thursday, August 25

BQA Training, Vintage Sales Stable, 3451 Lincoln Highway, E. Paradise, PA 17562, from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Classroom Level 1 training starts at 10 a.m., followed by a Chute Side training.



Representatives from Masonic Village were on hand to accept the award Tuesday, August 2. From left are Frank Stoltzfus, Masonic Village; Irene Stoltzfus, Masonic Village; Helen Tracy, Masonic Village; Gerald Tracy, Masonic Village; Dave Owens, Dow AgroSciences; Dennis Thompson, USDA - NRCS; and Dave Petty, ESAP selection chair.

Pennsylvania Farm Wins Regional Environmental Award

KISSIMMEE, Fla. — The Masonic Village Farm near Elizabethtown, Pa., was recognized as a 2011 regional Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) winner during the 2011 Cattle Industry Summer Conference in Kissimmee, Fla. The Masonic Village Farm is the Region I ESAP award winner and will compete with five other regional winners for the national ESAP award, which will be announced during the 2012 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn.

Dow AgroSciences; the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Cattlemen's Foundation; and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association sponsor the ESAP award.

The Masonic Village Farm is a not-for-profit continuing care retirement community, owned and

operated by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, with goals of achieving great conservational practices while ensuring that its residents continue to enjoy open spaces. The Masonic Village implements rotational grazing to maintain its pastures; uses manure from feedlots to fertilize its fields; and has created innovative watering systems. Additionally, the farm invites the public to tour the facilities and learn more about the possibilities of stewardship in agriculture. The Masonic Village was nominated by the Pennsylvania NRCS.

"The Masonic Village Farm has been a pioneer in protecting and improving water quality on their operation," said Donald McNutt, administrator of the Lancaster County Conservation District. "They are an exemplary example of a progressive, well managed beef and grazing operation which leads to their excellent conserva-

tion stewardship ethic."

Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, the Masonic Village Farm has partnered with federal and state agencies as well as private agricultural organizations to manage natural resources. According to a letter of support, Lance Kauf, Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association president, said the Masonic Village Farm is an exemplary steward of the land.

"Our association recognizes the efforts of those in our industry that embrace environmental stewardship practices and encourage others through their promotion of best management practices developed for our members within our state," Kauf said. "They have implemented numerous practices and consistently share the positive impacts they have made environmentally with others in our industry who are trying to achieve the same goal."

Beef Council Helps Red Cross 'Beef Up' Low Blood Supply

BEDFORD, Pa. — During August, the American Red Cross is asking the public to "Beef Up the Blood Supply" — literally and figuratively.

"Our blood supplies remain below desired levels, so we need to continue to work on replenishing, or beefing, up the blood supplies before the Labor Day weekend," said Lisa Hart, donor resources director.

The Red Cross and the Pennsylvania Beef Council are offering a beefy incentive for presenting blood donors at Pennsylvania blood drive and blood platelet donor centers in August. Come in to donate. Participants are entered to win a grill, a beef quarter, or a case of steaks. At select locations during the month of August, the Beef Council also will be grilling burgers for presenting donors.

Other sponsors for this August promotion include: Kentucky Beef Council, Maryland Cattlemen's Association, Ohio Beef Council, Virginia Beef Council, West Vir-



Kristin Wilkins of the Pennsylvania Beef Council, center, sits with two blood donors at the DuBois Blood Drive on August 8. A total of 77 units were collected at the drive.

ginia Beef Producer's Check-off, Lowes and Warehouse Sales.

For more information about donating, or to schedule an appointment to donate, visit www.redcrossblood.org.

For additional information about the Beef Up the Blood Supply event, contact Kristin Wilkins at kwilkins@pabeef.org.