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Dairy and Beef: Working Together to Assure Quality

PAUL SLAYTON AND JOHN FREY

In this edition of *Lancaster Farming*, you'll notice a new column (at right) entitled "Quality Care Matters" written by Rebecca Chaney. This column, a joint venture between the Pennsylvania Beef Council and the Center for Dairy Excellence, is intended to draw attention to the issues around animal welfare and the product quality expectations consumers have of us. Farmers have long enjoyed the trust of a consuming public; how often have we heard "our grandparents were farmers" and the trust afforded family has been the trust afforded to us. Well, much has changed, and our dairy and beef industries must reflect the ever changing expectations of consumers; especially those consumers in urban areas who have never been on a farm or ranch.

To help us communicate the messages around this topic, we've enlisted the help of someone who is no stranger to the dairy or beef industries. Rebecca Chaney grew

up on a farm in Maryland and has spent her life as an advocate for farmers and animal agriculture. She lives with her husband Lee and twin daughters on a dairy farm that was once in her family 100 years where Lee now manages Randall Land & Cattle Company, a registered Hereford operation. Rebecca focuses on ag education through promoting children's books by her daughters, is a freelance writer and speaker, and travels many miles throughout the year speaking on behalf of agriculture. We're pleased to partner with Rebecca as we work together to earn the trust of the marketplace. We hope you'll "tune in each month" and better understand the matters happening on the "quality care front."

Paul Slayton and John Frey are executive directors of the Pennsylvania Beef Council and Pennsylvania Center for Dairy Excellence, respectively.

Cattle Handling Focus of Stockmanship Tour

The Stockmanship and Stewardship Tour is an innovative, national seminar that uses live cattle demonstrations to inform cattle producers about the importance and benefits of proper cattle handling — and its critical role in increasing the consumers' confidence in beef.

Pennsylvania hosted the tour Nov. 11-12 at Middleburg Livestock Auction and Penn State Snider Agricultural Arena, attracting nearly 130 individuals between the two trainings. In addition to producers, 4-H members, college students and Middleburg Livestock Auction employees all attended the hands on-training session to learn more about stockmanship methods.

Leading the tour were renowned Montana horseman, rancher and stockmanship instructor Curt Pate

and Ron Gill, Texas A & M livestock specialist and lifelong cattleman, nationally respected for his expertise on cattle marketing, management, handling and beef quality assurance (BQA) principles. Pate and Gill shared the "three-legged stool" approach of animal care and handling, emphasizing ways to increase cattle performance by reducing handling stress.

Cargill Meat Solutions, Center for Beef Excellence, ErReR Hill Farms, All Flex Inc, and Pineland Natural Meats collaborated with the Pennsylvania Beef Council and the NCBA to bring the tour to Pennsylvania.

For information on future stockmanship programs, contact Nichole Hockenberry, Pennsylvania Beef Council, at (888) 423-3372 or by e-mail at nhockenberry@pabeef.org.



Beef producers gather at Middleburg Livestock Auction in November to learn cattle handling tips.



Quality Care Matters

A Column about Dairy Animal Care provided by the Pennsylvania Beef Council and the Center for Dairy Excellence.



REBECCA LONG CHANEY

In the last few years, animal agriculture has received its share of negative publicity and scrutiny, forcing both dairy and beef industries to become more proactive about animal care. With this heightened attention, agricultural groups are uniting to share the best possible quality assurance education with both beef and dairy farmers to help them provide the highest quality and safest food supply possible to consumers.

There are numerous dairy and beef quality assurance programs and it's up to the farmer or rancher to determine what program best fits their operation. But, what are the beef quality assurance (BQA), dairy animal care and quality assurance (DAC&QA), and dairy beef quality assurance programs (DBQA)? Simply, these animal care and food safety programs are the protocol for best herd health management practices for dairy and beef producers to follow to assure the highest quality meat product available.

Program manuals give guidelines that spell out simple herd practices. Ultimately, the main focus is improving record keeping; eliminating carcass defects; increasing consumer confidence in meat and milk quality; and stressing the importance of beef to dairy farmers' income.

According to John Frey, executive director for the Center of Dairy Excellence for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, a group of industry stakeholders from Wisconsin formally announced the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative (NDAWI) in 2007; the initiative serves as an umbrella of principles and guidelines for all dairy animal care programs in the U.S.

"Shortly thereafter, a number of Pennsylvania organizations including the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP), Penn State University (PSU), Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders (PDS), Pennsylvania Beef Council (PBC), and the Center for Dairy Excellence (CDE) met to discuss the potential for a Pennsylvania program and the adaptation of the well-respected Pennsylvania Beef Quality Assurance program to dairy," said Frey. "Within six months, the Pennsylvania Dairy Animal Care and Quality Assurance Program" was a reality." Manuals were printed and trainings were held to certify producers.

"In Pennsylvania, we've implemented a voluntary program for dairy producers," Frey explained. "Since then, we also have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with National DHIA and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) to have our Pennsylvania DAC&QA program serve as the foundation for their respective programs."

According to Jay Mattison, National DHIA chief executive officer, National DHIA has been partnering with the NCBA on Quality Assurance since 2007. "It is important to place dairy animals in the supply chain at the appropriate type and condition," Mattison said. "This helps both consumers and producers have confidence in the products and delivery of quality."

Mattison said their program has been in the development stage for the past two years, but culminated in the last 10 months. "The Pennsylvania Beef Council, Penn State, and the University of Penn



Rebecca Long Chaney

Vet School were all instrumental in the technical and content development of the dairy quality assurance reference manual," Mattison pointed out. "NCBA, National DHIA and Kansas State (University) were keys to our module development."

National DHIA is making an effort to work with dairy producers and their state and regional DHIA organizations to implement their Quality Assurance program. "Having the knowledge about Quality Assurance at cow-side will make everyone recognize their roles and the importance to the product. Gaining value and access in the market is the key to animal agriculture sustainability," noted Mattison.

With its Beef Quality Assurance program established almost 25 years ago, many groups look to the NCBA for information and guidelines. "The program exists in 50 states," said Ryan Ruppert, NCBA director of beef quality assurance programs. "Farmers and ranchers have the ability to take pride in their product and provide the safest, highest quality product in the world."

Ruppert believes their greatest BQA challenge is reaching the almost million cattle producers in the country, but he knows the program is making a difference.

"In 1991, we collected data on beef rounds and found 22.5 percent had injection site blemishes in them," Ruppert said. "We added injection site education to BQA and by 2000 we reduced that number to less than two percent. It's just one example of the program's success."

Promoting the BQA program is critical to the NCBA. They market their program nationwide through cattle organizations, veterinarians and through radio and RFD-TV. "We are going to have a very strong Internet campaign and educational program out soon," Ruppert added.

Like the NCBA, Pennsylvania beef and dairy groups have been leaders in BQA program development. They provided National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) and Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) with the necessary materials to develop their own program. Recently unveiled at the annual meeting for the NMPF, their new Quality Assurance initiative is called the National Dairy F.A.R.M. Program: Farmers Assuring Responsible Management. Its purpose is to demonstrate that U.S. milk producers are committed to providing the highest standards of animal care and quality assurance.

While NMPF manages the pro-

duction and dissemination of technical animal care manuals, producer education and training, on-farm evaluations, and third-party verification, Dairy Management Inc., (DMI) will help with communication. DMI will work specifically with producers and industry, as well as potential messaging to the market chain and consumers.

"It is not affiliated with the BQA program, although BQA staff did serve as advisors during the development," said Betsy Flores, NMPF director regulatory affairs. "Our focus is only on dairy producers and dairy animal care. Our outreach to producers, consumers, and others in the dairy industry has been very positive. This national effort will help create a stronger platform for producers to continue to build consumer trust in the ways they care for their animals and in the products they produce. A national program will bring consistency and uniformity to on-farm animal care and production practices throughout the country."

A few states are tackling the BQA issue locally. New York is one such state, establishing the New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program (NYSCHAP) in 1998. Since its inception 11 years ago, 1,338 farms are enrolled with 860 active farms representing 35 percent of the New York dairy population. NYSCHAP also works with beef producers, with approximately 70

beef farms active in the program.

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"The program entails a team approach that includes a farm visit and health risk management," said NYSC-HAP Coordinator Kathy Finnerty. "The team is comprised of a NYSC-HAP veterinarian, the herd veterinarian, the producer, key employees and

any appropriate consultants. The team reviews the risk assessment and formulates a plan of best management practices to implement for the coming year. All farms enroll in the core module, which examines biosecurity, herd health and production parameters."

Many of these local programs are in direct response to the National Dairy Animal Well-being Initiative (NDAWI) developed by the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin (PDPW). "The PDPW was the catalyst and facilitator for the National Dairy Animal Well-being Initiative," said Shelly Mayer, executive director for the PDPW. "The PDPW along with about 60 other stakeholders worked together to proactively define what an animal well-being program should contain — then other groups started to develop their own programs."

While there are several different BQA and DBQA programs across the country, they all share one main goal — give the best possible care to animals, resulting in both higher profitability on the farm and increased consumer confidence. With this win/win program, it is now up to each individual producer to decide what program is best suited for their farming or ranching situation.

For more information about some of the BQA/DBQA programs available, visit one of these Web sites: www.dhia.org; www.pdpw.org; www.centerfordairyexcellence.org; www.nyschp.vet.cornell.edu; www.bqa.org; www.nationaldairyfarm.com or www.pabeef.org www.pa-bqa.org.

See an article on freezer beef marketing on page A31.