

Quality Assurance in U.S. Feedlots,¹ 2011

The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program is a State and national industry-led effort that provides guidelines to support the production of quality beef. The goal of the program is to raise consumer confidence in beef quality through recommended management techniques and a commitment to quality within segments of the beef industry, including feedlots. Guidelines included in a BQA program focus on issues that include feedstuffs, feed additives and medications, processing and treatment records, injectable animal health products, care and husbandry practices, and guidelines for the general care and handling of cattle. Participating in the BQA program can help ensure that quality beef reaches consumers through safe handling, feeding, and care of cattle. Improvements in cattle care and health will undoubtedly increase the quality of beef for consumers. In addition, the BQA program helps to improve food safety and support animal welfare and well-being, major concerns of consumers. The use of the BQA program can positively impact all that are involved, including cattle, feedlot operators, and consumers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted the Feedlot 2011 study, an in-depth look at large feedlots (1,000 head or more capacity) in 12 States² and small feedlots (fewer than 1,000 head capacity) in 13 States.³

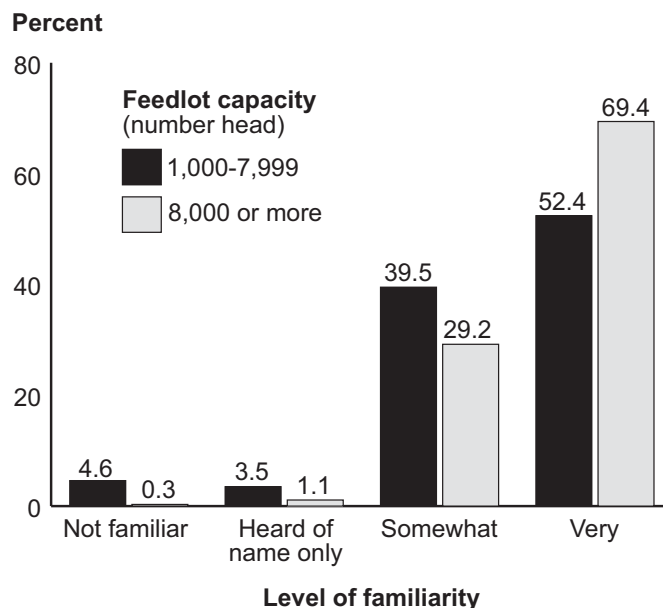
Large feedlots accounted for 82.1 percent of the January 1, 2011, inventory of feedlot cattle in all U.S. feedlots but only 2.8 percent of all feedlots. The 12 participating States accounted for over 95 percent of the inventory of cattle in large feedlots (NASS, "Cattle on Feed" February 18, 2011). Small feedlots accounted for 16.0 percent of the inventory on all U.S. feedlots and 92.9 percent of all U.S. farms with cattle on feed. The 13 participating States accounted for 85.4 percent of U.S. farms with fewer than 500 cattle on feed and 90.5 percent of the inventory on farms with fewer than 500 cattle on feed (NASS, 2007 Census of Agriculture). Study results presented in this information sheet reflect only large feedlots,⁴ which were divided into two groups:

those with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head and those with a capacity of 8,000 or more head.

Familiarity with the BQA program

An objective of the Feedlot 2011 study was to describe feedlot operators' familiarity with the BQA program and to describe management practices that may impact beef quality. Widespread awareness of the BQA program has been a goal of the beef industry for several years. Operators on 52.4 percent of feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head were very familiar with BQA program, compared with operators on 69.4 percent of feedlots with a capacity of 8,000 or more head (figure 1). Overall, only 4.6 percent of feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head and 0.3 percent of feedlots with a capacity of 8,000 or more head had operators who were not familiar with the BQA program.

Figure 1. Percentage of feedlots by operator's level of familiarity with the BQA program, and by feedlot capacity



¹ For feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 head or more.

² Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Washington.

³ Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin.

⁴ Information on small feedlots is available at:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/nahms/feedlot/index.shtml

Importance of BQA practices

Operators on over 9 of 10 feedlots, regardless of capacity, indicated that each BQA practice listed was somewhat or very important (table 1). Clearly, there was widespread agreement on the importance of BQA practices.

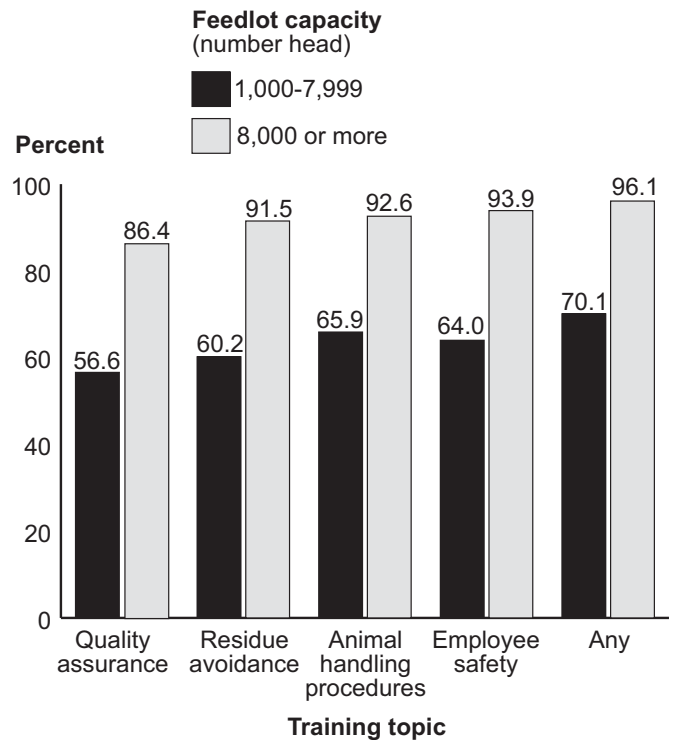
Table 1. Percentage of feedlots in which the operator indicated that the following BQA practices were somewhat or very important, by operation capacity

Practice	Percent Feedlots	
	Feedlot capacity (number head)	
	1,000–7,999	8,000 or more
Location used for administration of injectable products (e.g., in neck, shoulder, side, or leg)	99.0	99.6
Route used for administration of injectable products (intramuscular, intravenous, subcutaneous)	99.1	99.6
Implanting strategy	93.1	98.1
Antibiotic selection to manage disease (e.g., type of FDA-approved antibiotic used or duration of action)	98.3	99.6
Residue avoidance	99.1	95.2

Training for BQA practices

Seven of 10 feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head (70.1 percent) had formal training programs for employees on one or more of the listed BQA practices, compared with nearly all feedlots with a capacity of 8,000 or more head (96.1 percent) [figure 2]. This difference could be due to the smaller number of employees on the lower-capacity feedlots, leading the operators and owners to assume that a formal BQA training program is unnecessary.

Figure 2. Percentage of feedlots with a formal BQA training program for employees, by feedlot capacity and by training topic



Summary

These data suggest that feedlot operators, regardless of feedlot capacity, are aware of BQA programs and believe that the programs are an important aspect of running an operation. Continuing outreach through training programs, seminars, and other methods is important to maintain and advance support for the BQA program.

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