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Wyoming Beef Quality Assurance goal to provide safe, wholesome product

By Tammie Jensen

Wyoming Beef Quality Assurance (WyBQA) was developed to assist beef cattle producers in providing consumers a safe and wholesome product.

Cattlemen want and need to produce a high-quality product that creates a fine dining experience for consumers. The goal of WyBQA is to maximize consumer confidence by encouraging beef producers to implement holistic management practices to provide marketing opportunities for participants. Committing to WyBQA, a voluntary program, is simply good business.

Topics producers should keep in mind as they develop and implement individual BQA programs include injection sites, bruising, record keeping, and relationships with a veterinarian.

Injection Site Lesions/ Management

Injection site lesions were identified as a serious problem in the 1991 National Beef Quality Audit. Injection site blemishes were found in 22.3 percent of the top sirloin butts studied. Significant improvement has been made as injection site blemishes have been reduced to less than 3 percent.

Further research proved injection sites affected product tenderness. A Colorado State University study showed tenderness decreased significantly up to 3 inches from the center of a lesion when compared to shear force values (a measure of toughness) of steaks without lesions.

The WyBQA program established these guidelines for producers and veterinarians to follow when administering injections:

1) regardless of animal age, all injections (intramuscular [IM] or subcutaneous [SQ]) should be given in front of the shoulder in the neck region and never in the rump, top loin, or back leg;
2) preference is given to injections that can be administered SQ, intravenously, or orally;
3) never exceed 10 cc per IM injection site;
4) space injection sites at least 4 inches apart;
5) follow proper record keeping protocol to document individual and group treatments, route of administration, product used, product lot, and serial number.

Bruising

Tissue damage from bruising is a quality concern for feeder cattle and cull cows and bulls. Depending on the severity of an injury, damaged muscles may take 60 to 90 days to heal. These lesions require cutout and removal of damaged tissue that may total 3 to 4 pounds per damage site. Studies show the loss per head on market cows and bulls was $2.24. The total loss from bruised tissue cutout was approximately $61 million in retail sales for 27 million pounds of meat product. Producers are reminded to use good management practices when moving and processing cattle to reduce bruising and decrease situations that cause stress for cattle.

Record Keeping

Record keeping is a critical management tool, whether computer or hand-generated. Documenting the safety and quality of the beef product is vital to ensuring consumer confidence.

Producers should use a record keeping method comfortable for themselves. They should record the use of all processing products such as vaccines, dewormers, "pour-ons," etc. Records should reflect the animal treated, treatment type, treatment date, treatment dose, and the prescribed withdrawal time for individually or group-treated cattle. Records for age and source verification of cattle are quickly becoming a necessary part of producer records.

Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship

A valid veterinary-client-patient relationship is an important part of any quality assurance program. This relationship exists when a veterinarian has taken the responsibility for making judgments regarding the health of an animal, and the need for the animal's attention, and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's instructions. The veterinarian should have sufficient knowledge of the animal (operation) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis and be readily available for follow-up evaluation.

Other Considerations

Other factors to consider in a quality assurance program are various feedstuffs, feed additives and medications, care and husbandry practices, culling management, breeding and genetics, food safety, and biosecurity issues. For further information or to become BQA certified, contact your local veterinarian or local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service educator.

A list of county offices is available at http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/UWces/Counties.asp. For detailed tips on quality assurance, see the BQA Web page at www.bqa.org.

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Reduce risks, improve business through diversification

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Introduction

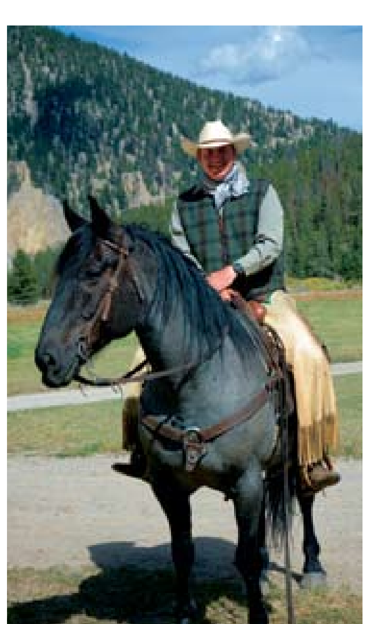
"Should I change one or more enterprises to stay profitable?"

"Are there better options for diversifying my operation and reducing risk?"

Many producers have faced these questions. In today's environment of rising costs and unstable markets, focusing on one enterprise may be too risky. Diversification is one strategy to consider for reducing financial- and production-related risks. It can be as simple as adding a different crop into the rotation or as complex as converting part or all of an operation to a new enterprise such as outfitting or wildlife management.

Why Diversify?

Risk in agriculture comes in many forms, including price variability. Individual commodity prices tend to be highly variable over time. Price variability usually translates into income variability. This is where diversification enters.



First and foremost, diversification can help lower the risks of price and income variability. It addresses the proverbial problem of "all the eggs in one basket." While there may be great potential for success if markets are good, there is a great risk of loss. Producing products with offsetting changes in market price can help lower income variability over time.

Diversification may be the only way some operations are able to grow or cope with increasing costs. Most producers are extremely effective managers. Production levels are increased by squeezing every last pound of gain or bushel per acre while cutting costs as much as possible. These measures can increase profits in the short term but may limit potential in the long term.

Where input costs continue to increase over time, an operation must see an offsetting growth in revenue to compensate. In addition, some minimum level of revenue is required to meet the financial obligations of the business. The risk of not meeting these obligations increases when there is only one source of income.

Diversifying a business is one way to take advantage of opportunities when they arise. For example, a cash-grain farm that produces corn and soybeans will not capitalize if cattle prices increase. Because grain prices tend to move in the opposite direction of cattle prices, having either a cow-calf or feedlot enterprise may be one way to capitalize on increasing cattle prices. A farm or ranch locked into one enterprise or commodity is simply not able to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves in other markets.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The main advantage of diversifying an operation is the potential for risk management. Price and income variability can be reduced using the proper mix of enterprises. Using land, capital or equipment for businesses other than production agriculture can provide non-farm income to supplement the agriculture operation. Diversifying can help managers move away from unprofitable enterprises and watch for newer and better production practices to improve existing enterprises.

Disadvantages of diversifying come mainly in the form of increased costs. These costs may arise from new or different equipment, increased labor, more buildings and infrastructure, or increased borrowing and capital costs. For example, cattle may be a good fit for a cash crop operation; however, buying into the cattle business may not be a feasible option for many crop producers in a situation where fencing and stock water are unavailable or expensive to establish. In addition, expanding an operation may not be possible due to capital or other constraints.

While diversifying may offer the potential for lowering risks, starting any new enterprise or business the manager is unfamiliar with is risky. Producers should develop plans carefully for any new enterprise. Diversifying can easily require more time and management than anticipated. For help on enterprise diversification and other risk management topics on the Web, visit the Western Risk Management Library at http://agecon.uwyo.edu/RiskMgt

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