

Animal Well-Being

The more than 800,000 U.S. beef producers are committed to caring for their animals and producing safe, wholesome beef for consumers around the world. Several factors contribute to animal well-being including food, water, bone and muscle strength, immunity to illness, as well as overall behavior and health.

- Beef producers have long recognized sound animal husbandry practices—based on research and decades of practical experience—are critical for the well-being of cattle, individual animal health and herd productivity.

Beef Quality Assurance Program

The checkoff-funded Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program provides cattle producers with the tools and training necessary to assure animal health and well-being as well as provide a safe, quality product. These tools are the result of years of scientific research and practical experience and are continually updated to provide the latest in animal management information and technology. BQA includes guidelines on proper administration of animal health products, best management practices and animal handling recommendations and influences the management practices of more than 90 percent of cattle.

Producer Code for Cattle Care

The “Producer Code for Cattle Care,” first developed in 1996, is a comprehensive set of sound production practices, which includes the following recommendations:

- Provide adequate food, water and care to protect cattle health and well-being.
- Provide disease prevention practices to protect herd health.
- Provide facilities that allow safe and humane movement and/or restraint of livestock.
- Provide personnel with training to properly handle and care for cattle.

The Code’s animal welfare focus is clear: Persons who willfully mistreat animals will not be tolerated.

Industry Care and Handling Guidelines

In 2003, the beef industry expanded the Code into a best practices guide. Developed through the interaction of animal health and well-being experts and cattle producer leaders, the “Cattle Industry’s Guidelines for the Care and Handling of Cattle” sets forth recommendations for every aspect of cattle production and provides producers a self-evaluation checklist to help improve their production practices.

Scientific Guidance on Animal Welfare Practices

Animal welfare guidelines, standards and audits are developed with scientific guidance from veterinarians, animal scientists, agricultural engineers and animal well-being experts.

- Temple Grandin of Colorado State University worked closely with beef packing plants to develop best practices for proper handling practices. Dr. Grandin also taught facility managers how to conduct regular internal audits of plant. The American Meat Institute, which represents packing plants, reports that more than 90 percent of its members administer these self audits.
- The Agricultural Research Service conducts scientific research into animal well-being through the Animal Well-Being and Stress Control System implemented in 1994.
http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/programs/programs.htm?NP_CODE=105
- The National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) tracks industry trends, identifies opportunities for improvement and detects emerging problems. NAHMS information about animal health and welfare is available through the Center for Animal Health Monitoring.
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ceah/ncahs/index.htm>

Humane Handling Throughout the Production Process

Beef producers work with every segment in the production chain to ensure proper animal care continues after cattle leave the farm or ranch. For example, the educational “Focal Point” DVD encourages livestock market owners and operators to apply BQA principals in their facilities. More than 1,200 auction market operators received the DVD, which demonstrates best practices for facility design and handling techniques.

Cattle transporters play a critical role in the health and welfare of cattle by delivering cattle safely to their destination. BQA’s Master Cattle Transporter Training (TBQA) program ensures proper management of weak or injured cattle, handling, loading and unloading and transportation during hot or cold weather. The National Trucking Association encourages its members to comply with these guidelines.

The meat packing process has evolved over the years, based on the latest scientific research, to ensure both humane animal treatment and food safety. The Humane Slaughter Act of 1958 dictates strict animal handling and slaughtering standards for packing plants. Those standards are monitored by thousands of federal meat inspectors nationwide and include:

- All animals must have access to water. Those kept overnight must have plenty of room to lie down, and animals kept longer than 24 hours must also have access to feed.
- Handling and moving cattle through chutes and pens must not cause stress.
- Livestock must be rendered insensible to pain prior to slaughter.