



Beef Quality Assurance: What is it, and why should I care?

Bob LeValley, Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance Coordinator

The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program is a producer-driven certification program in which cattle producers work toward a common goal to assure consumers that cattle from each segment of the industry (cow/calf, stocker, feedlot) are healthy, wholesome, quality products. The cattle are managed in a way that is appropriate to each individual operation, so that beef quality and safety are considered in all production practices. Many view BQA as a “consumer confidence” program, in which consumers can feel assured that the beef they purchase has been produced using the best production practice standards in the cattle industry. The cow/calf or stocker segments of the industry may often seem distant from the retail meat counter, but many early management decisions and tasks may influence the quality of that beef product. When a beef producer becomes BQA certified it helps send a message to consumers that they are willing to do what is necessary in their management of cattle to assure they are producing a quality product.

The BQA program is voluntary. There is no requirement for cow/calf or stocker operations to be BQA certified unless they sell calves into a premium or branded program that may have BQA certification as a requirement. Most packers require fed cattle they purchase to be sourced from BQA certified operations, so nearly all feedlots are BQA certified. While certification is not a requirement for cow/calf and stocker producers, it may however, have some economic value to cattle buyers to know that the calves have been produced following BQA management principles.

The BQA program focuses on the following management areas:

- Care and management practices
- Feedstuffs
- Feed Additives and medications
- Processing, treatment, and record-keeping
- Injectable animal health products

How can I get BQA Certified or Re-certified?

There are two methods a producer can become BQA certified. One is accessible at <https://www.bqa.org/> where one can complete the certification entirely on-line. The on-line certification process consists of viewing several modules, followed by short quizzes. In-person certification is also an option. The in-person certification consists of

a presentation and review of the BQA program followed by a short quiz. Due to COVID-19, the most available option currently is the on-line method. If you are interested in an in-person certification program, contact the OSU Extension office, to be notified when an in-person certification option is available in the area.

BQA certification is valid for three years from the date of completion. To maintain their status, producers must re-certify. The re-certification process is essentially the same as the initial certification. It can be accomplished through the on-line process or an in-person program.

Bottom line:

Good production practices and good animal husbandry make sense for all segments of the industry: the cow/calf producer that sells at weaning, the stocker operator, and the feedlot. Incorporation and utilization of management practices that will result in better beef eating experiences for consumers should mean a higher level of consumer confidence and satisfaction, leading to a higher beef demand.

For additional information regarding the Beef Quality Assurance certification program, give us a call at the OSU Extension Office.

Annual Grass Weeds in Bermuda Pastures and Hay Fields

Josh Bushong, Area Extension Agronomy Specialist

Bermuda can be very competitive if managed properly. Correcting soil pH and nutrient deficiencies accordingly to a soil test is a top priority. For bermuda, nitrogen management is always going to be of main focus but phosphorous and potassium can also be very beneficial. Other cultural weed suppression practices include proper stocking rate and prescribed burning. Leaving 2 to 3 inches is essential for good regrowth for both haying and grazing bermuda.

Prairie threeawn (aka wiregrass, ticklegrass, old-wild threeawn) is an annual warm season grass weed. It usually encroaches into bermuda in less productive soils and over-grazed pastures. Correcting soil phosphorous levels is as important if not more important than nitrogen. Fall prescribed burning has shown to be very effective as shown by some field trials conducted by Kansas State University. Burning in November was effective because the seeds were still attached to the stems and were more easily consumed by the fire.

Field trials conducted by OSU showed good efficacy on threeawn when a tank-mix of Pastora and low rate of glyphosate was applied. Pastora didn't add much to the control, but its label allows for the glyphosate to be legally applied when tank mixed. Glyphosate is no longer labeled to be applied by itself. Some bermuda injury will be expected but the

stand should eventually recover with good growing conditions. These field trials also showed that if soil fertility wasn't corrected, threeawn repopulated very quickly.

Sandburs are another annual warm season grass and is often found in sandy acidic (low pH) soils. Correcting soil pH and applying adequate nitrogen will be the most beneficial to improve the stand of the bermuda. Pasture burning can reduce sandbur seed production if executed at the right time and intensity. Fall burns will likely be better, unless there is sufficient fuel for a hot spring burn. If the fire from the burn is not hot enough, it may actually stimulate germination which can be beneficial if followed by a herbicide program.

Use of a preemergence herbicide (applied before sandburs germinate) like pendimethalin (Prowl H2O) will help reduce half to two-thirds of the largest and early flush of sandburs. Pendimethalin can be applied when the bermuda is dormant and in season between hay cuttings.

Postemergence herbicide (applied after bermudagrass and sandburs are actively growing) options include glyphosate (Roundup Weathermax), imazepic (Plateau), or nicosulfuron with metsulfuron (Pastura). Read and follow label directions for rates, application timings, and surfactants to limit crop injury and to achieve satisfactory sandbur control.

Lack of control is usually due to herbicide application timing. Sandbur growth stage is critical for some products. For instance, after sandburs reach 1.5 inches tall control will be reduced with products like Pastora. If applied correctly, over 90 percent of the sandburs can be controlled with the postemergence herbicides. Keep in mind, sandburs will continue to emerge as the season progresses which may make it appear like the early herbicide application failed.

A multi-year strategy of combining cultural suppression practices and herbicides is necessary. For more information refer to OSU factsheet PSS-2596 Sandbur Control in Bermudagrass Pastures or visit your local OSU Extension office.

Updates to Livestock Risk Protection Insurance

Trent Milacek, Extension Area Ag Econ Specialist

USDA is constantly making changes to farm programs and Livestock Risk Protection insurance is no different. Following up on the update in November, the program has further meaningful changes that will help producers.

In case you missed the previous update, there have been major changes to the subsidy levels. They are broken down by subsidy and coverage level in the following way; 35%

for 95-100%, 40% for 90-94.99%, 45% for 85-89.99%, 50% for 80-84.99% and 55% for 70-79.99%. This makes LRP a very competitive price protection strategy for feeder cattle.

Other changes to LRP is an increase in the insurable head per endorsement. The old limit was up to 1,000 head per endorsement with a total of 2,000 insurable head per year. The new limit is up to 6,000 head per endorsement and a total of 12,000 per year.

The length of the insurance coverage remains unchanged varying from 13, 17, 21, 26, 30, 34, 39, 43, 47, or 52 weeks. Insurance can be purchased on calves, steers or heifers, which fall in the weight classes of Weight 1 (under 600 pounds) or Weight 2 (600-900 pounds). These weight classes are also unchanged.

Further updates include allowing the marketing of livestock up to 60 days prior to the endorsement end date whereas the previous allowance was 30 days. Also, producers can cover unborn livestock enabling them to price protect animals before calving season.

Coverage levels vary between 70 percent and 100 percent of the expected ending value of the animals. The coverage options available vary each day so it is important for producers to check the RMA website

<https://public.rma.usda.gov/livestockreports/main.aspx> daily to determine which coverage options are available. The ending values of the policy are based upon the weighted average prices reported in the CME Group Feeder Cattle Index. This index is used to settle the Feeder cattle contracts.

An indemnity payment is triggered if the actual ending value (as determined by the CME Feeder Cattle Reported Index) is lower than the coverage price on the chosen end date. This has nothing to do with what the producer receives for the animals in the cash market when he sells the cattle. Indemnity payments will only occur if the price declines below the coverage level on the end date. Also, the producer must own the cattle and have taken delivery of them in order to qualify for the insurance coverage.

For example, let's look at purchasing insurance coverage for a producer who wants to use LRP to put a floor on his 2021 wheat pasture steer crop. He normally sells in the middle of March and his steers weigh 500 pounds in November. His herd consists of 100 predominately Angus cross steers.

The insurance was purchased in November, so he needed 21 weeks of coverage. The option he selects includes feeder cattle steers for the 2021 crop year with an expected ending value of \$128.050 per cwt. He chooses a 99% coverage level with a coverage price of \$128.000 per cwt., with an end date of March 23rd. The premium will be \$7.746 per cwt. He expects the steers to gain 250 pounds over the course of this coverage. The premium is calculated by multiplying the final weight in cwt. by the premium cost per cwt. and the number of head covered. So $7.5 \text{ cwt.} \times \$7.746 \times 100 \text{ hd.} = \$5,809.50$. RMA

subsidizes 35 percent of the premium cost so the producer will be responsible to pay $\$5,809.50 \times .65 = \$3,776.10$.

If on the end date of March 23rd, the CME Feeder Cattle Reported Index is below the coverage price of \$128.000 per cwt., an indemnity will be triggered. For example, if prices fall to \$120.00 cwt., the producer would be paid $\$128.000 - \$120.00 = \$8.00$. The producer's payment is $100 \text{ hd.} \times 7.5 \text{ cwt.} \times \$8.00 = \$6,000.00$. This farmer received an indemnity payment of \$6,000.00 on 100 steers for the cost of \$37.76 per head. While there is no way to know what the actual ending price will be, this is an effective option to manage downside price risk.

Perils not covered include death, government seizure, and forced destruction. However, if you report missing/dead cattle to your insurance agent within 72 hours of the occurrence, the affected livestock will be included if an indemnity is triggered. Not giving notice of the loss will result in the affected livestock being excluded from the indemnity calculation and the premium will not be refunded.

Livestock Risk Protection can be purchased through a livestock insurance agent. If you would like further details on how to purchase Livestock Risk Protection Insurance, please visit rma.usda.gov/Information-Tools/Agent-Locator-Page to find an agent and visit <https://www.rma.usda.gov/en/Fact-Sheets/National-Fact-Sheets/Livestock-Risk-Protection-Feeder-Cattle> to view the fact sheet.

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Time to Evaluate Beef Cow Herd Breeding Potential

Britt Hicks, Ph.D., Area Extension Livestock Specialist

With spring calving approaching, now would be good time to evaluate the breeding potential of your cows. Research has shown that the body condition score (BCS) of beef cows at the time of calving has a huge impact on subsequent rebreeding performance. Body condition scoring is a practical management tool to allow beef producers to distinguish differences in nutritional needs of beef cows in the herd. Simply put, BCS estimates the energy status (fat cover) of cows. The scoring system used is a 1 to 9 point scale where a BCS 1 cow is extremely thin while a BCS 9 cow is extremely fat and obese. A BCS 5 cow is in average flesh or body condition. A change

of 1 BCS is equivalent to about 90 lb of body weight. To optimize pregnancy rates, mature cows should have BCS of 5 or greater at calving and 1st calf heifers should have a BCS of at least 6 at calving.

Research has shown that the BCS of beef cows at the time of calving has a huge impact on subsequent rebreeding performance. This occurs because the BCS of a cow influences days to first estrus after calving and calving interval. For a cow to maintain a 365 day calving interval, she must conceive within about 82 days after calving (283 day

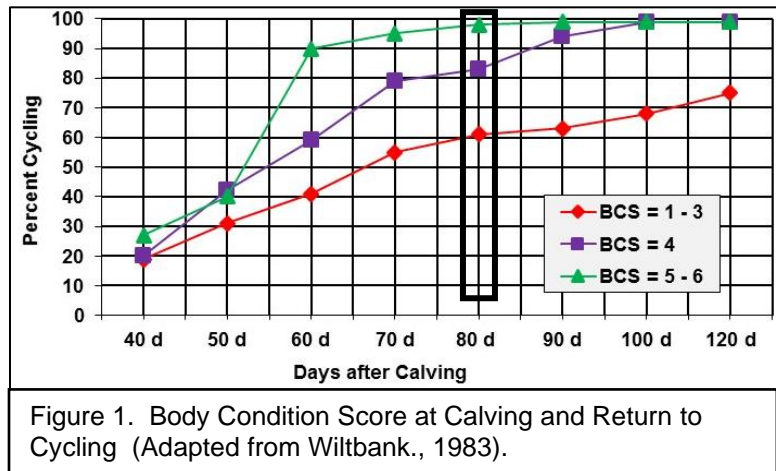


Figure 1. Body Condition Score at Calving and Return to Cycling (Adapted from Wiltbank., 1983).

gestation + 82 day postpartum interval = 365 days). Figure 1 illustrates that 90% of the beef cows with BCS >5 at calving showed signs of estrus by 60 days post-calving, whereas only 59% of beef cows with BCS 4, and only 41% of beef cows with BCS <3 showed estrus. The rectangular box in this figure shows the critical breeding time in order to achieve a 365-day calving interval. Even though cows that calve in a BCS of 7 have a short postpartum interval, it is not economical to feed cows to a BCS of 7.

Research (Figure 2) suggest that increasing calving BCS from 3 to 4 would increase pregnancy rate by about 35 percentage points (from 32 to 68%). Increasing calving BCS from a 4 to a 5 would increase pregnancy rates by about 20 percentage points (from 68 to 88%). Note this same effect of BCS at calving on pregnancy rates has been observed in different regions of the country (Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas).

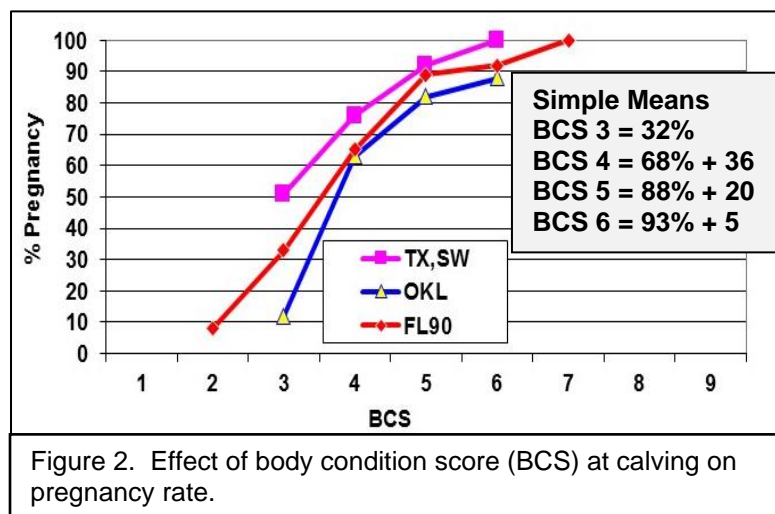


Figure 2. Effect of body condition score (BCS) at calving on pregnancy rate.

In addition, thin cows at calving (BCS 4 or thinner) produce less colostrum, give birth to less vigorous calves that are slower to stand and these calves have lower immunoglobulin levels, thus reducing their ability to overcome early calf-hood disease challenges. All of these data illustrate the importance of targeting mature cows to calve in a BCS of at least 5. Since 1st-calf-heifers have only reached about 85% of their

mature weight after calving and require additional nutrients to support growth, it is recommended that they be fed so they are a BCS of 6 at calving.

If your cows currently have inadequate condition, there is still some time to change the BCS prior to calving. Manage your mature cows for a BCS of 5+ at calving. If the cows are in BCS of 5 at calving, a slow gradual weight loss after calving is acceptable. Whereas, if the cows are less than BCS 5 at calving then one needs to hold or increase BCS (weight gain) after calving. However, increasing BCS from calving until breeding will be difficult and costly since cows are lactating.

Extension Experience – Insights into Oklahoma Agriculture

The Northwest Area Extension Staff would like to announce the creation of our new podcast *Extension Experience*. The *Extension Experience* podcast is brought to you by Josh Bushong, Trent Milacek, and Dana Zook. Each week they provide perspective on Agriculture topics and offer insight from our experience working with Extension Educators and Producers across Oklahoma.

The *Extension Experience* podcast is available on Spotify, Google Podcasts, and Apple Podcast platforms. You can also access the episodes on spotlight, <http://spotlight.okstate.edu/experience/>.

We hope you consider listening to Extension Experience.

