

BEEF QUALITY AUDITS IN THE U.S.A.

Gary C. Smith

**Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado USA**

National or international Audits that provide assessments of quality and/or safety of beef and veal have been conducted in the USA since 1991. National Injection-Site Audits were conducted annually from 1991 through 2000 while the Strategic Alliance Field Study (1993), the International Beef Quality Audit (1994) and the National Veal Quality Audit (1998) have each been conducted once. National Market Cow and Bull Beef Quality Audits (for non-fed beef) were conducted in 1994 and 1999; National Beef Quality Audits (for fed beef) were conducted in 1991, 1995 and 2000. Except for the International Beef Quality Audit-1994 (administered by the U.S. Meat Export Federation), all of the Audits listed above were administered by the Beef Quality Assurance Advisory Board of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. All of the Audits listed above were funded by beef producers through their \$1-per-head checkoff and were conducted for the Cattlemen's Beef Board. With regard to effecting change in production practices of U.S. cattlemen, the National Injection-Site Audits have been immensely successful. Results of the first Audit revealed that the incidence of injection-site lesions in the top sirloin butts, in July 1991, was 21.3%; results of the final Audit in this series revealed that the incidence of injection-site lesions in the top sirloin butt, in July 2000, was 2.1%. The Strategic Alliance Field Study-1993 was a demonstration quality audit that documented reductions in incidence of quality defects and improvements in quality attributes of cattle, carcasses and offal (edible and inedible) that could be achieved if supply chains, based on strategic alliances among beef industry sectors, were actuated. The International Beef Quality Audit-1994 identified quality characteristics of U.S. beef that are essential to satisfy international trading partners and characterized areas of opportunity for improving the appearance, quality, cutability and value of U.S. beef in foreign markets. The first Audit in each series of the domestic "Quality Audits," the National Beef Quality Audit-1991 (for fed beef from slaughter steers and heifers), the National Market Cow And Bull Beef Quality Audit-1994 (then called the "National Non-Fed Beef Quality Audit," for non-fed beef from salvage/cull, dairy and beef cows and bulls) and the National Veal Quality Audit-1998, was intended to serve as a baseline characterization of quality defects in animals, carcasses and offal items for that commodity. Those baselines are used as benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of industry education efforts, especially those of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Quality Assurance programs (e.g., BQA for beef) in improving the quality of U.S. beef and veal. To illustrate the effectiveness of the process of conducting Audits on improving beef quality in the USA, consider these findings from the Questionnaire Results (Phase I) of the National Beef Quality Audit-2000: (1) Percentages of responses, by sector of the industry, identifying a "strong" or "moderate" impact of past National Beef Quality Audits on the "Changes Made Since 1991 In U.S. Beef Quality" were 17 and 60, respectively, for 2,611 responding producers, 7 and 55, respectively, for 29 responding packers, and 10 and 72, respectively, for 113 responding purveyors/retailers/ restaurateurs. (2) Value-loss due to quality defects decreased by \$6.54 (2.35%) from 1991 to 2000 using NBQA-1991 logic and prices and decreased by \$20.96 (15.43%) from 1995 to 2000 using NBQA-1995 logic and prices, for each slaughter steer or heifer harvested in those respective years. (3) Of items included in the "Top Ten Quality Challenges" for the fed beef industry at the conclusion of the three Audits, "excessive external fat" decreased in importance (2nd in NBQA-1991, 5th in NBQA-1995, 6th in NBQA-2000) as did "price is too high for the value received" (4th in NBQA-1991, 8th in NBQA-1995, unranked in NBQA-2000) while "inadequate tenderness" increased in importance (7th in NBQA-1991, 4th in NBQA-1995, 3rd in NBQA-2000) as did "excessive weights" (unranked in NBQA-1991, 6th in NBQA-1995, 2nd in NBQA-2000) suggesting need for redirection of educational efforts over time.

To convey results of quality Audits to those in the U.S. beef industry, the findings are included in reports disseminated as news releases, fact sheets, bulletins, printed executive summaries, videotapes, slide sets, power point presentations, etc. For example, the Final Report of the Third Blueprint for Total Quality Management in the Fed-Beef (Slaughter Steer/Heifer) Industry-"Improving The Quality, Consistency, Competitiveness And Market Share Of Fed Beef (National Beef Quality Audit-2000)"-includes the following components: (a) Questionnaire Results revealing opinions of seedstock generators, cow/calf producers, stockers/backgrounders and feedlot operators regarding "changes they have made since 1991" and "results of past NBQAs." (b) Questionnaire Results providing insight of packers, purveyors, retailers and restaurateurs with respect to "greatest improvements made since 1991" and "results of past NBQAs." (c) Results of audits of 30 packing plants, geographically distributed throughout the U.S., for harvest-floor data (brands, horns, manure, hide color, bruises and condemnations) and for cooler data (carcass weight, gender, breed type, Quality Grade factors and Yield Grade factors). (d) Economic assessment of quality losses per slaughter steer/heifer because of quality problems/defects/shortcomings/shortfalls/nonconformities. (e) A "Success Story" itemizing all of those quality characteristics for which industry participants deserve congratulations. (f) Characterization of the "Top Ten Quality Challenges For The Fed-Beef Industry." (g) A "Commitment To Never-Ending Improvement" for those involved in the U.S. fed-beef industry. (h) "Strategies" for improving the quality of beef from fed steers/heifers. (i) "Tactics" for improving the quality of beef from fed steers/heifers. (j) "Goals By 2005" for improving the quality of beef from fed steers/heifers. (k) "Research Goals" identified by participants in the Strategy Workshop of the National Beef Quality Audit-2000. There are critics of the openness with which results of Audits are released to the public. Some say we shouldn't reveal the shortcomings of fed beef to those with whom we compete in domestic markets for animal-protein market share (e.g., those in the pork and poultry industries) and/or to those with whom we compete in international markets (e.g., Canada, Australia, New Zealand). But, if it is true that real success comes not by improving a single thing by 100%, but by improving 100 things by 1%, and not by improvements by some, but by improvements by all, of the industry partners and participants, then it is imperative that knowledge of what it is specifically that needs improvement must be generally know and thus widely disseminated. The Audits conducted in the USA have been highly successful in identifying what needs to be done to improve the quality of U.S. beef and veal. And, we are doing it. Rapidly in some instances, at glacial rates in others, but we are doing better!

(C) Department of Animal Sciences Colorado State University. January 2000.