



Western Dairy News

for the West, about the West, from the West

Leading by example: Pleasant View Farms

Pennsylvania herd is winner of the 2012 national Dairy Beef Quality Assurance Award.

by **Travis W. Hoffman**
Colorado Beef Quality Assurance Coordinator
Department of Animal Sciences,
Colorado State University
and Nichole Hockenberry
Director of Industry Relations,
Pennsylvania Beef Council

“**H**appy cows are healthy cows. Healthy cows are productive cows. Productive cows are profitable cows.”

This belief by Logan Bower, owner of Pleasant View Farms in Blain, Pennsylvania, ties together the significance of Dairy Beef Quality Assurance (DBQA) in his operation to productivity and profitability. Bower was recently named 2012 National Dairy Beef Quality Assurance Award Winner. His passion runs deep as a second-generation dairy producer, and his exemplary management and leadership is summarized when he says, “I have to lead by example. I want to be a good example for people to follow.”

Over the years, Pleasant View Farms has grown and prospered. Bower was employed by his parents for 10 years before leasing the operation in 1991 and purchasing it in 1999. The dairy milks 550 cows that produce more than 13 million pounds of milk annually, and also raises 550 replacements. Previous expansions included an increase from 150 head to 350 milking in 1999, and another expansion in 2002 from 350 head to the present herd size. Forage needs for the herd are raised on 750 acres of cropland, of which 150 are owned and 600 are rented.

Since 2009, Cargill Meat Solutions, Safeway’s Rancher Reserve® Beef brand, and The Beef Checkoff have recognized a National Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Award recipient for one outstanding beef and dairy producer that best dem-

onstrate animal care and handling principles as part of the day-to-day activities on their respective operations. A common trait among all winners is a strong desire to continually improve BQA on their operations while encouraging others to implement the producer education program.

“We’re in the business of caring for animals, and cattlemen and women understand that animal care and producing delicious, wholesome food go hand-in-hand,” says John Maas, DVM, with the University of California-Davis Cooperative Extension program and chairman of the BQA Producer Education Committee. “The BQA program is just one example of the many ways that we as an industry stand behind this principle.”

Animal care

Bower knows that the way animals are treated has a big impact on beef quality. “The key to profitability is removing as much stress from the animal as possible. We’re learning more and more every day what the cow likes and what she doesn’t like, so to keep up with that you have to make changes,” he explains.

During its two expansion projects, Pleasant View Farms strived to enhance cow comfort by replacing older, smaller free stalls with larger, better designed stalls with a soft surface for cows to rest on. Bower also constructed housing that allowed grouping of animals according to their needs and during different stage of their lactation. A new transition barn gave closeup dry cows a better environment to prepare for calving and transition into the milking herd. To improve cow comfort even more, Pleasant View Farms continues to implement management changes such as feed bunk sprinklers and fans to keep cows cool in summer.

Prior to the expansions, annual herd average was approximately 18,000 pounds per cow. With



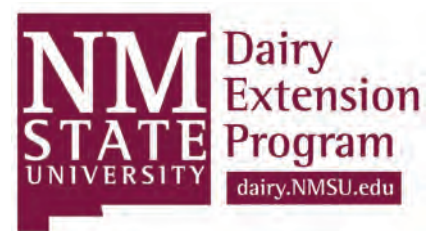
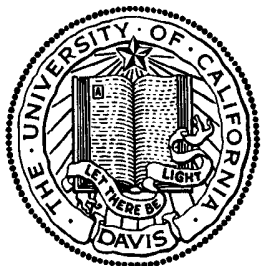
Logan Bower, owner of Pleasant View Farms in Blain, PA.

the improvements to cow comfort, feeding and nutrition, and careful attention to forage quality, herd average now exceeds 25,000 pounds.

In 2000, due to the rapid expansion, replacement heifers were raised by a custom grower from a week of age up to approximately 20 months. As opportunities presented themselves, the replacement herd has slowly been moved back to the dairy. Because of limited capital for housing, a pasture-based system has been developed. Every system of housing has its positives and negatives, but Bower believes it is his responsibility to build upon the positives and limit the negatives.

His commitment to animal care and continuous improvement is summarized when he says, “You have to give them the environment they want, give them the feedstuffs that they need, and they will produce for you. But whenever you put the stress on them, and try to push them and force them to do things they don’t want to do, you don’t get the productivity, you don’t get the profitability, and you don’t get the animal health.”

Western Dairy News is a collaborative effort of Dairy Specialists from:



Extension Service





Logan Bower (left) receiving the 2012 National Dairy Beef Quality Assurance Award from Greg Persing of Cargill Meat Solutions.



Providing cows an environment that is as comfortable and stress-free as possible, such as upgrading to new free stalls after two expansions, is a cornerstone of the management philosophy at Pleasant View Farms.

BQA production management

Pleasant View Farms has incorporated numerous Beef Quality Assurance principles. "It [BQA] makes me more aware, it makes me more conscientious of trying to produce a quality beef product," explains Bower. He regularly reviews low-stress animal handling techniques with his employees; absolutely no yelling at or striking animals is tolerated. They have standardized protocols to ensure that all newborn calves receive colostrum and supplemental immunoglobulin.

Their vaccination program ensures all replacement animals receive modified live vaccine with proper boosters, and adult animals receive a booster once a year. All antibiotics and vaccines are properly stored and physical inventory is taken once a month. All treatments, whether antibiotic or vaccination, are recorded in a computer program that calculates milk and meat withholding dates. The herdsman and assistants are regularly trained on proper injection techniques and sites. All fresh cows and treated cows are tested for antibiotic residues before milk is cleared for sale. Every tank of milk is also given a SNAP test as a final check for any residues. All cull cows are inspected for blemishes or injuries. Any animal determined unfit for auction sale is shipped directly to a local butcher. Any injured or downer cows is quickly, humanely and properly euthanized and composted. Lastly, they strive to provide 24-hour quality care for all animals at the dairy.

Measurables

As a milk producer, it has always been Bower's goal to utilize resources as efficiently and responsibly as possible to produce a high quality, wholesome product. Extra attention to animal care and stewardship have returned great rewards, both in the sense of productivity and high quality products. "How your employees care for the animal is reflected in not only the quality of milk but the quality of your meat," Bower emphasizes.

As in most confinement dairy operations, two big management challenges are mastitis and lameness. Pleasant View Farms enrolled in a program with a supplier to regularly evaluate the milking parlor for proper performance and to update equipment as new technologies are developed. Bower coordinates training for milkers to ensure proper milking procedures, thus reducing the risk of mastitis. In December 2010, old and worn out free stall mattresses were replaced with a softer, more durable material to enhance cow comfort in both the short term and for the long term.

Realizing the importance of proactive management, last summer they purchased a hoof-trimming chute that allows them to give prompt attention to any animal with signs of lameness. They also initiated a more controlled rotational grazing

system for heifers, dry cows and a small group of milk cows. Getting them off concrete and out of confinement, even if only during the dry period, has proven to have great benefits.

"The happier you make the animal, the more productive it's going to be. Our goal is figure out what is stressing the animal and remove it from her," says Bower. In addition to higher production per cow, another effect of these management practices has been to cut average herd somatic cell count to under 150,000. Less lameness has also reduced the involuntary culling rate to a point where Pleasant View Farms now sells a few extra animals for dairy purposes. When grazing dry cows last summer and fall, they also noticed a significant reduction of dystocia, plus the percent of calves born dead dropped from eight percent to four percent. Calf health improved, too, which cut the use of medication needed.

Communication

As with any successful dairy operation, collaboration and communication is key among all workers. Furthermore, Bower has found that building trust and respect via improved worker relationships is essential to daily success. "I feel very fortunate that I have a group of employees that is not only very productive, but work very well together. They respect me and I respect them. There is nothing that I wouldn't do for them and, likewise, there is nothing that they wouldn't do for me. We've become a close knit family," he explains.

Commitment

Bower is exemplary in his commitment to his profession. His leadership includes serving on the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative that established principles and guidelines for dairy farm animal care programs. Its broad principles and guidelines address nutrition, animal health, management, housing and facilities, animal handling and transportation, and third party oversight. He also served on the committee that upgraded the Dairy Beef Quality Assurance (DBQA) certification program to the Dairy Animal Care & Quality Assurance (DACQA) program, as well as hosting one of the first DACQA certification sessions in Pennsylvania. He also serves as a volunteer for the Dairy Spokesman Network, has been on the Pennsylvania Beef Council Board, is a past president of the Professional Dairy Producers of Pennsylvania, and was a board member for the Pennsylvania Center for Dairy Excellence.

Do your part

All dairy producers should, without question, implement a quality assurance program because it is simply the right thing to do. Bower is well aware that perception is reality and that it is important to stay active in community organizations

that allow him to tell Pleasant View Farms' story. He proudly displays his DACQA certification sign in a highly visible area. Perception is further enhanced by continually grooming roadside berms and keeping the farmstead in good repair. They even use a power broom to remove manure and mud that has been tracked onto high-use public roads in order to keep them clean. Some of the dairy's fenced-in land that is used for grazing is in a highly visible area for the public to notice clean, healthy dairy animals on lush green grass. This has turned out to be some of the best public relations work Bower has done in his 20 years in the dairy business. They also emphasize the quality of care that animals are given under Pleasant View Farms' management system when they directly market dairy beef to consumers.

While unfamiliar with agriculture, consumers are increasingly making demands about the production practices used to raise the food they eat. Proactive management of your dairy farm and participation in the DACQA program help result in wholesome milk and quality beef. More than ever, it is our responsibility to lead by example and tell the story of modern production agriculture. For dairy operations to continue to enjoy the freedom to operate productively and efficiently, they must demonstrate an ethical commitment to provide for the wellbeing of their animals.

Animal care and stewardship are core values to dairy farmers, and striving for continuous improvement of animal care and an emphasis on meat and milk quality fits the goals Pleasant View Farms. Congratulations to Logan Bower and Pleasant View Farms for leading by example as the 2012 National Dairy Beef Quality Assurance Award Winner.

Western Dairy News is published as a service to people interested in the health and welfare of the Western dairy industry. Archives of this publication may be found at:
<http://animalscience-extension.tamu.edu/dairy/wdn.html>

For further information contact:
 Dr. Ragan Adams, Editor
 ILM, CSU-VTH
 300 W. Drake Road
 Fort Collins, CO 80523
 970-297-0371
 radams@lamar.colostate.edu

Material published in Western Dairy News is not subject to copyright. Permission is therefore granted to reproduce articles, although acknowledgement of the source is requested.

Cooperative Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.