

New beef quality assurance director represents partnership

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UNL Extension educator Rob Eirich has been appointed as the director of beef quality assurance (BQA) for the state of Nebraska.

Eirich's position is a new one within the university, one that Eirich says represents a partnership between UNL, Nebraska Cattlemen and the Nebraska Beef Council. In the past, Nebraska Cattlemen directed the state's BQA program.

The BQA director position is housed, organizationally, in the UNL Animal Science Department and, physically, in the UNL Panhandle Research and Extension Center at Scottsbluff. Nebraska Cattlemen provide salary and program support, and some funding comes through the Nebraska Beef Council. All three entities make up an advisory board.

"We view it as a three-way partnership to support the program and the operations of the director of the program," Eirich said.

According to the National Beef Quality Assurance web site (www.bqa.org), "Beef Quality Assurance is a nationally coordinated, state implemented program that provides systematic information to U.S. beef producers and beef consumers of how common sense husbandry techniques can be coupled with accepted scientific knowledge to raise cattle under optimum management and environmental conditions."

Eirich said BQA concerns itself with practices throughout the production process, mainly dealing with animal health, food safety and product quality.

"No matter what the segment, from the cow-calf producer to the dinner plate, everything we do affects the quality as well as the eating satisfaction of consumer," Eirich said.

"We work with veterinarians and extension educators to do trainings for feedlots, livestock auction markets, anybody who handles cattle frequently. We train people and keep them updated on latest animal health issues, products, and practices," Eirich said.

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He said the cooperative arrangement between the university and cattle industry groups creates an opportunity to build a partnership beneficial to all groups. Nebraska Cattlemen is able to focus more on policy issues important to the industry. UNL Animal Science can provide expertise and build relationships with the industry throughout the state.

Eirich's role will be developing programs with veterinarians and educators across Nebraska to get information out through trainings and seminars, as well as developing new and updated materials.

Eirich said meat processors prefer that everybody involved with animals that the process go through BQA certification, which is good for two years. Currently, he said Nebraska has about 2,000 BQA-certified people, adding, "That number of people impacts a lot of cattle."

Eirich said covering the entire state will involve a lot of travel. Many of the cattle are in the western two-thirds of Nebraska, but there are still many feeding operations in the eastern one-third.

"My goals include increasing the number of beef cattle producers in all segments to be certified in BQA and develop a strong network of BQA trainers with veterinarians and extension educators to that we have a good resource for BQA in Nebraska," he said. "As we see Nebraska on its way to becoming No. 1 in beef cattle numbers and cattle on feed, we also want to lead the nation in producing a good quality, wholesome product for consumers, guaranteeing consumers a quality, safe product that has a high eating satisfaction."

Before coming to the BQA position, Eirich worked at Eastern Wyoming College at Torrington, Wyo., for four years as animal science instructor and coach of the livestock judging team. Before that, he was an Extension Educator at UNL in Panhandle District in several counties. His agricultural experience includes about 14 years with Eirich Brothers, a diversified crop and livestock operation and seeds dealer at Bayard, some of that time as a partner. He also was a feedlot foreman at Brush, CO.

Eirich can be contacted by phone at the Panhandle Center, 308-632-1230, or by email at

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