Pork Quality Assurance Plus™ Program

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Abstract

Pork producers in the United States have developed a new food safety and animal care certification program that builds on the current Pork Quality Assurance (PQA™) program. Working with the pork industry’s customers, pork producers have created a workable, credible and affordable solution to assure food safety and animal care and at the same time meet the needs of customers including restaurants, food retailers and, ultimately, consumers. The industry’s solution is a continuous improvement system focused on producer education and premises assessment, which is called PQA Plus™.

Introduction

The PQA program was introduced in 1989 as a multi-level voluntary producer education program to increase residue avoidance awareness. Since its introduction in 1989, Pork Quality Assurance has become the pork industry’s flagship educational program. The PQA Plus program provides producers with information about on-farm good production practices (GPPs) for the promotion of pork safety and pig well-being. Development of the PQA Plus program, which began in 2005, added animal well-being and site assessment components (portions of which were formerly known as the Swine Welfare Assessment Program or SWAP™) to the PQA program. The program has become a proven resource for information to improve food safety and well-being, in addition to efficiency of production and assessment of premises.

The PQA Plus Program is comprised of two main elements - food safety and animal well-being. Food safety refers to the practices that minimize physical, chemical or biological hazards. This includes the responsible use of antimicrobials to minimize the potential for the development of antimicrobial resistance. Animal well-being encompasses producer responsibilities for all aspects of animal well-being, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, responsible care, humane handling, and when necessary, humane and timely euthanasia.

There are nine Good Production Practices (GPPs) that address food safety and/or antimicrobial resistance and one that addresses animal care. A site assessment has also been developed to assess animal care practices. While many of the GPPs were included in previous programs they were further developed through input from industry experts in food safety, production, animal welfare, and veterinary medicine. The draft GPPs, educational materials, and the assessment were then beta tested on farms of various sizes, and edits were made to address concerns identified. The program will be launched in 2007 and will have a three-year implementation period.

Discussion

The PQA Plus program comprises two main elements - food safety and animal well-being. Food safety refers to the practices that minimize physical, chemical or biological hazards that might be injurious to consumers. Animal well-being encompasses producer responsibilities for all aspects of animal well-being, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, responsible care, humane handling and when necessary, humane and timely
euthanasia. Food safety and animal well-being have become concerns for consumers, both domestic and international.

Customers are concerned about their food and how the animals are raised. The PQA Plus program sets the example for the meat commodities by showing that the U.S. pork industry is proactively addressing food safety and animal well-being issues. The participation of U.S. pork producers in PQA Plus opens markets abroad and shows to all customers that we have a commitment to a safe, wholesome food supply. The fact that numerous packers have incorporated the PQA certification into United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved HACCP plans shows their confidence that the PQA program will help ensure food safety.

The 10 PQA Plus GPPs are:

GPP #1 Establish and implement an efficient and effective herd health management plan.
GPP #2 Use a veterinarian/client/patient relationship (VCPR) as the basis for medication decision-making.
GPP #3 Use antibiotics responsibly.
GPP #4 Identify and track all treated animals.
GPP #5 Maintain medication and treatment records.
GPP #6 Properly store, label, and account for all drug products & medicated feeds.
GPP #7 Educate all animal caretakers on proper administration techniques, needle-use procedures, observance of withdrawal times, and methods to avoid marketing adulterated products for human food.
GPP #8 Follow appropriate on-farm feed processing and commercial feed processor procedures.
GPP #9 Develop, implement and document an animal caretaker training program.
GPP #10 Provide proper swine care to improve swine well-being.

PQA Plus Certification is certifying that the producer has completed the PQA Plus educational program with a PQA Plus Advisor. PQA Plus Certification is valid for three years from the date of issuance. To become PQA Plus Certified, an individual must attend a PQA Plus Certification training session on the 10 PQA Plus GPPs conducted by a PQA Plus Advisor. No examination is required for PQA Plus Certification but retraining is needed for recertification.

PQA Plus Site Status is a PQA Plus status assigned to a production site and stays with that site for three years from the date of the assessment. To be granted PQA Plus Site Status the production site must be identified with a premises ID. The site also must have associated with it a PQA Plus Certified individual that has a stable relationship/responsibility with the production site. Finally, the site needs to have a PQA Plus site assessment done either by a PQA Plus Advisor or an Endorsed individual. Once these criteria have been met and a PQA Plus Advisor reports the assessment data, the site will receive a PQA Plus Site Status that will be valid for three years. Reassessment is required to renew PQA Plus Site Status. The anonymous aggregate data from the PQA Plus site assessments will be used to help the Pork Checkoff direct research and educational programming.

The first step for a producer to get a PQA Plus Site Self-Assessment Endorsement is to hold a current PQA Plus Certification. A training session with a PQA Plus Advisor is the next step during which the producer will need to successfully complete and pass an examination covering PQA Plus GPP #10 and the on-farm site assessment process. The PQA Plus Site Self-Assessment Endorsement is valid for up to three years based on the date of issuance of PQA Plus Certification. Retraining and completing and passing an examination is required for re-endorsement.

Conclusion

The PQA Plus program consists of 10 GPPs to ensure that pork is free from chemical and physical hazards and that the pigs are raised in a caring manner with regard to their well-being. The 10
SPPs, when implemented, will lead to operating more efficiently and to maintaining the reputation of not only the producer, but the entire U.S. pork industry. These 10 practices are based on:


QA Plus is a continuous improvement system focused on producer education and premises assessment that is a workable, credible and affordable solution to assure food safety and animal care and at the same time meet the needs of customers including restaurants, food retailers and, ultimately, consumers. The program will be launched in June of 2007.