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An advantage of participating in an independent program is that multiple systems can be managed under one umbrella program. Whereas a packing company will only want to document product requirements for its own product lines, an umbrella program can offer a broader range of verifications. Receiving animals from producers covered by these umbrella programs may also benefit packers, who would not incur the risks associated with approving suppliers. In addition to animal age, for example, a producer may want to document a breeding program or verify source of origin to increase marketing opportunities.

**QSAs and Country-of-Origin Labeling**

QSAs have been created to ensure compliance with specific import requirements of other countries. As such, a QSA program will not be required for domestic programs such as the U.S. COOL program. The COOL program would require that producers keep records to verify compliance but would not require a pre-approved USDA system.

**QSAs and the National Animal Identification System**

One of the realities of a QSA for Japan age verification is that the animals be identified and their birth date recorded, at least by group. The National Animal Identification System will require that all cattle be individually tagged with an ear tag. Producers may be able to participate in a QSA program through their identification supplier. When evaluating identification suppliers, producers should ask the following questions:

- Is the company’s QSA program approved for age verification to Japan?
- Is the company’s QSA program compliant for COOL?
- What else does the company’s QSA program include?

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While the Japanese market is not currently open, some calves born this spring will likely be exported to Asian markets. To qualify for export to Japan, the animal must have been 20 months of age or younger at slaughter and born, raised, and processed by farms and firms that are in a USDA pre-approved QSA program. Relatively few of these programs exist today, but the number is growing. Producers should consider their options: whether they want to establish their own QSA, sell to a buyer who has a QSA program, or participate in an independent QSA program. Although any sector in the beef supply chain may develop a QSA program, identification suppliers and producer organizations are expected to provide the independent QSA service.

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