



Pork Quality Assurance Plus® (PQA Plus®)

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Introduction

In June 2007, the National Pork Board launched the Pork Quality Assurance Plus® (PQA Plus®) program to reflect increasing customer and consumer interest in the way food animals are raised. PQA Plus was built as a continuous improvement program focused on food safety and animal welfare. The program maintains its food-safety tradition to ensure that U.S. pork products continue to be recognized domestically and internationally as the highest quality and safest available. At the same time, PQA Plus provides information to ensure that producers can measure, track and continuously improve animal well-being. In short, PQA Plus gives pork producers another tool to demonstrate to consumers the U.S. pork industry's ongoing commitment to produce a safe product in a socially responsible way.

Development of PQA Plus®

PQA Plus is a fusion of three previous National Pork Board programs that have been widely used in the past:

- Pork Quality Assurance® (PQA®) – Since 1989, producers have participated in PQA, an education and certification program focused on reducing the risk of violative residues in pork resulting from animal health products. The program was modeled after the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) programs used by food manufacturers to ensure the safety of food products, but customized for on-farm use. PQA was designed to identify the practices with potential to result in a food safety hazard and minimize this potential risk through producer education on relevant on-farm practices.

- Swine Welfare Assurance Program® (SWAP®) – SWAP was made available to producers in 2003. The program was designed as an educational and assessment tool for producers to track the well-being of their animals on-farm. The program delivered education on such topics as proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, responsible care, humane handling and when necessary, humane and timely euthanasia.

- Take Care – Use Antibiotics Responsibly™ – Take Care was released in 2005 and encourages producers and their veterinarians to follow specific principles and guidelines when using antibiotics to minimize the risk of antibiotic resistance.

PQA Plus Program Elements

The PQA Plus program achieves its goals through:

- Producer training by a certified PQA Plus advisor which results in the producer receiving PQA Plus certification.
- An objective assessment of animal well-being on farms which, when combined with the education of the producer through PQA Plus certification, results in the farm receiving PQA Plus Site Status.
- A PQA Plus third-party verification designed to evaluate the implementation of PQA Plus in the industry. Third

party verification results are used to identify opportunities for improvement of the program's information and delivery. Producer training and on-farm assessments are performed by certified PQA Plus advisors. The network of certified PQA Plus advisors spans the United States. Certified advisors are veterinarians, animal scientists, university extension specialists or agricultural educators with a doctor of veterinary medicine or bachelor of science degree or equivalent experience in animal science or associated fields. They also must have two years of recent, documented swine production experience. Advisors must attend a PQA Plus training session and successfully pass an examination proving knowledge of the program, the implementation of training, and the on-farm assessment.

Producer Training

Ten good production practices that are guidelines for safe and responsible use of animal health products and for continually and objectively evaluating and, when necessary, improving animal care are at the core of PQA Plus. The ten good production practices (GPPs) are:

- GPP 1 - Establish and implement an efficient and effective herd health management plan.
- GPP 2 - Use an appropriate veterinarian/client/patient relationship (VCPR) as the basis for medication decision-making.
- GPP 3 - Use antibiotics responsibly.
- GPP 4 - Identify, track, and maintain medication and treatment records for all treated animals.
- GPP 5 - Adhere to medication withdrawal times.
- GPP 6 - Properly store, label, and account for all drug products and medicated feeds.
- GPP 7 - Use 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 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.

The content of these 10 GPPs can be found in the PQA Plus producer manual printed in both English and Spanish (<http://www.pork.org/filelibrary/PQAPlus/PQAPlusEdBook.pdf>). Anyone involved with the production and handling of pigs in the U.S. is eligible to attend a PQA Plus training session offered by a certified PQA Plus advisor to receive PQA Plus certification. PQA Plus certification is valid for three years after which the individual must attend another training session to become recertified.

On-Farm Site Assessment

The on-farm site assessment is an educational and evaluation process developed to track the well-being of pigs on-farm. The assessment can be completed by a PQA Plus advisor or by an individual producer who has been specially trained to conduct a site assessment. The assessment includes:

- A review of records including evidence of a Veterinary/Client/Patient Relationship, medication and treatment records, caretaker training programs, written emergency backup plan, daily observation records and written euthanasia plan,
- Observation of facilities including operating emergency backup system and effectiveness of facility maintenance practices, and
- Observations of the animals including body condition scores, available body space, timely euthanasia, air temperature, air quality and evidence of willful acts of abuse or neglect.

Each of these assessment points are explained in detail in the PQA Plus site assessment guide (<http://www.pork.org/filelibrary/PQAPlus/SiteAssessmentGuide.pdf>). Once a site has been assessed, it gains a PQA Plus Site Status that is valid for three years. After three years, another site assessment must be completed for continuing a farm's PQA Plus site status. While site status is valid for three years, producers may work with their PQA Plus advisor to determine if an increased frequency of assessments is appropriate.

Third-Party Verification

The third-party verification is an evaluation to measure the effectiveness and success of the PQA Plus program, not to find farms that are out of compliance. The aggregate results from this evaluation are used to identify areas where additional education and training are needed to improve the program and promote continuous improvement within the pork industry.

Production sites receiving PQA Plus site status will be entered into a pool from which a statistically valid random sample of sites will be eligible to participate in the third-party verification process. The individual associated with the randomly selected sites will receive information on how to schedule a date for the third-party verifier to visit the site. The verifier will travel to the farm to conduct the evaluation at an agreed-upon date and time. The verifier will evaluate the same points that were assessed during the on-farm site assessment. The results of the evaluation will be left with the producer who is encouraged to work with their PQA Plus advisor to address any areas that were identified as unacceptable during the third-party verification process. The third-party verifier will also enter their findings into the same database where the site-assessment data is held. The results of the third-party verification will be reported only in aggregate to the National Pork Board.

Summary

More information about the PQA Plus program and its many resources can be found online at <http://www.pork.org/Certification>. Pork industry customers and consumers can be comfortable with the knowledge that U.S. pork products are produced following good production practices that enhance food safety and in a way that promotes animal well-being because of programs such as PQA Plus. PQA Plus demonstrates American pork producers' commitment to make themselves accountable for the way they produce pork products that feed the world.

References

<http://www.pork.org/Certification>, accessed July 20, 2010.

National Pork Board. 2010. PQA Plus® Producer Certification Manual. National Pork Board, Clive, IA.

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