

a system that may involve several entities. These companies or groups have certified through USDA a system of records and procedures that can verify their claims to specific attributes of their product. For source and age verification, most beef processors have an approved QSA for exporting beef. This QSA describes how age/source will be documented by the packer with cooperation from source feedlots and their producer suppliers (cow-calf producers).

As with a PVP, QSA certification requires considerable records, labor and capital to establish. The program is regularly audited and must have auditing procedures as part of its certification. Entities with approved USDA QSA programs include packers and large beef feeders (AgriBeef, Cargill and Texas Cattle Feeders). The State of Arkansas, under the direction of the Department of Agriculture, is currently working to establish a state-sponsored QSA program. It is too early to tell when the program will be operational or what costs will be involved, but it will be an option to cattle producers in the near future.

Role of PVP and QSA Programs in Exporting Beef

USDA has established Beef Export Verification (EV) Program requirements for selling beef internationally. These requirements outline the specific requirements for each country, including which products may be exported, processing regulations and stipulations for the cattle producing the beef. In the case of Japan, a specific requirement is that the beef be from cattle 20 months of age or less. For most other countries (Hong Kong, Mexico, Canada), the age requirement is 30 months or less. These EV age regulations must be met through cattle from a USDA Process Verified Program that requires age verification or from a USDA QSA Program that requires age verification. Simply put, beef is not eligible for export to Japan unless it comes from cattle less than 20 months of age and from cattle certified through a PVP or QSA.

So What Does This Mean to Me, A Cow-Calf Producer?

Age and source verification have taken on a new meaning. For calves to be truly source and age verified, they must be enrolled in a PVP or QSA as previously described. Simply stating “source and age verified” may quickly become equivalent to stating the cattle “have had all their shots.” It has been established that a signed affidavit will not substitute for documentation provided through a USDA-approved PVP or QSA.

To sell calves as source and age verified, cow-calf producers will most likely be providing information to a PVP or QSA program. When participating in a PVP program, producers will supply the necessary documentation for source and age and be able to sell their calves as “USDA Process Verified.” Thereby, these calves would be recognized in the industry as being Source and Age Verified, and this verification could be utilized by cattle feeders and processors to fulfill the requirements of their QSA for Export Verification. Therefore, PVP-certified cattle for age should meet the documentation requirements for any cattle feeder or packer (i.e., PVP cattle will meet the requirements of multiple QSA programs).

Currently, producers retaining ownership are working with their feeders to provide the necessary documentation and paperwork to fulfill the requirements of a packer QSA. These QSAs are specific for each packer, and each has different forms and procedures. In many cases, the producer needs to receive training from the feedlot as part of the requirement of the QSA. In some instances, producers who have sold feeder cattle have been contacted by feedyards requesting the information for a QSA.

What Records Do I Need to Keep?

The key item in this new era of source and age verification is records and documentation. Unfortunately, there are no standardized forms that fit all PVP or QSA programs (although the required information is essentially the same). Each program has its own forms, but by keeping certain basic types of information, you can be ready for source and age verification.

Here are basic recommendations for records to keep and procedures to perform:

1. Tag all calves with a unique number in your herd at or near birth. Ideally, all cows should also be identified. Freeze branding cows or recording Bangs tag numbers is not a bad idea as a backup to lost ear tags.
2. Keep detailed calving records such as the IRM Red Book or Arkansas Herd Inventory Program Herd Book (AG87; available at your county Extension office). This includes calf ID, dam ID, calving date and sex of calf. At the very least, record the date the first calf was born and the day the last calf was born. Keep records in a safe, readily accessible location.
3. Keep records of all cattle sales.

