

Functional quality management systems for livestock producers

Abstract: Quality management systems programs were used to help farmers (niche market producers, a Midwest cooperative of pork producers, and other livestock producers) improve their management techniques and cost-control skills and increase market access.

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More details:

www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/grants/2009-1/M2006-03.pdf

Customers, neighbors, and regulators are demanding more information from farmers. Producers are finding it difficult to keep up with expanding requirements for certification, documentation and regulation while also managing their operations for profit and sustainability. Quality management systems (QMS) are proven tools, offering farmers a systematic business decision analysis model applicable for use with branded programs that require age and source verification programs, feed ingredient limitations, animal welfare guarantees, and other label stipulations.



What was done and why?

Initial objectives:

1. Hold a train-the-trainers session for Extension personnel who will be working with producers to develop the QMS systems.
2. Work with at least forty Iowa cattle and hog farmers who will attend training in QMS principles and develop a QMS for their farm's livestock enterprise.
3. One year after the training workshops, 25 Iowa livestock producers will use QMS principles in daily operations, annual planning and business evaluations.

To achieve these objectives following some audience shifts and programming changes, the scope of work was narrowed to two main activities: curriculum and materials development and program delivery.

What did we learn?

- There is a lack of understanding of the need for using organized management systems and the economic benefits generated by using these systems.
- Few niche market producers currently are using any computerized sow management system. However, with input costs rising quickly, there is more interest in monitoring and managing pig flow and cost structure. Farmers will need to transition from traditional production attitudes to more business-oriented operations.
- It is difficult for producers to alter their own practices. Policies and rules that create demand for training may change that. To make programs like this most effective, it is important to focus on educating farmers about systematic management. It is vital that the program offered to farmers be able to stand alone and be used because it is practical and makes economic sense.