



Taking the Next Step

As a pork producer, you know that maintaining customers' trust is good for business and good for the pork industry. Today, consumers want to know more about where their food comes from and how it is produced. The Checkoff's Pork Quality Assurance® Plus (PQA Plus®) program is helping to reassure consumers about pork's quality and safety through educational training (PQA Plus certification) and on-farm site assessments (PQA Plus site status).

With more producers than ever participating in the program, the industry has made great strides, but more needs to be done. Now the pork industry is taking the next step through a PQA Plus third-party verification process.

As of April 2011, more than 14,000 sites have been independently assessed, and the Pork Checkoff is urging more producers to get involved. Also, all sites that have completed a site assessment and possess a valid PQA Plus site status will be included in a selection pool this spring. A statistical sample of sites will be selected from this pool to participate in a verification survey. This will measure the effectiveness of the PQA Plus program via an on-farm survey conducted by a qualified third party.

The credibility of the PQA Plus program is based on three steps, said Chris Novak, CEO of the National Pork Board. A certification component, site status designation and third-party verification.

"The PQA Plus program is only valuable if we can demonstrate to our customers that we practice what we preach," Novak said. "The PQA Plus certification program is an important step, but demonstrating and documenting our commitment to the PQA Plus Good Production Practices through the site assessment process is vital to the success of the program."

The certification and site assessment components of PQA Plus work together to help producers earn and maintain the trust of customers, from retailers to foodservice outlets to the consuming public. Over time, the third-party verification process also will help provide proof to industry partners, customers and the general public that the pork industry works to continuously improve its practices.

You'll find answers to frequently asked questions and other timely information about the third-party verification process in this newsletter. ✓

FAQs about Third-Party



To retain site status, pork producers are required to have a certified PQA Plus advisor conduct a site assessment every three years and review the site's implementation of the care and well-being principles of proper swine care outlined in PQA Plus' Good Production Practices.

Starting this spring, PQA Plus is going the extra mile to make the program even more beneficial to the pork industry and its stakeholders. An additional step to establish a credible performance baseline will include a third-party to conduct a random-sample survey of enough sites (90) to statistically verify the integrity of the PQA Plus program.

Site Assessments, Surveys Reflect Commitment to Animal Well-Being

You can talk all day about the pork industry's commitment to animal care, which is one of the industry's We Care principles, but it's much more powerful when you walk the talk. That's where a Pork Quality Assurance® Plus (PQA Plus®) site assessment, third-party verification and the Good Production Practices come in.

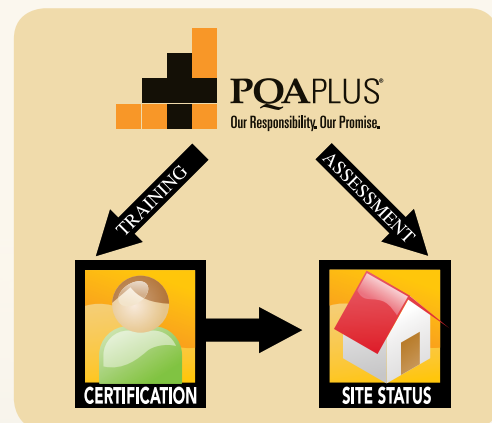
"Pork production is a diversified industry with many ways to raise pigs that are good for the animals, pork producers and consumers," said Sherrie Niekamp, director of animal welfare for Pork Checkoff.

PQA Plus' Good Production Practices:

1. Establish and implement an efficient and effective herd health management plan.
2. Use an appropriate veterinarian/client/patient relationship (VCPR) as the basis for medication decision-making.
3. Use antibiotics responsibly.
4. Identify and track all treated animals.
5. Maintain medication and treatment records.
6. Properly store, label and account for all drug products and medicated feeds.
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.
8. Follow appropriate on-farm feed and commercial feed processor procedures.
9. Develop, implement and document an animal caretaker training program.
10. Provide proper swine care to improve swine well-being.

Q: How does verification fit into PQA Plus?

A: PQA Plus has three distinct components:
1) Certification;
2) Site Status; and
3) Verification.



The third-party verification process of PQA Plus, being phased in this spring, has three primary objectives:

1. Measure the effectiveness of PQA Plus via an on-line survey conducted by a qualified third party.
2. Collect and aggregate data to identify ways to improve program content and training methods.
3. Over time, provide irrefutable proof to industry partners, customers and the general public that the pork industry works to continuously improve its practices.

Q: Is there a cost for the verification process?

A: There is no cost to participate.

Site Verification

Q: How could my operation be selected for a verification survey?

A: All sites that have completed a site assessment and possess a valid PQA Plus site status will be included in a selection pool. Then, a statistical sample of 90 sites will be selected at random from the pool. These sites will be asked to participate in a verification survey. Surveys will be ongoing throughout the year. The National Pork Board will not know the identities of selected producers or the names of their operations. This will be kept confidential by the third-party under contract to manage the verification process and results.

Q: Who is the verifier who conducts the survey?

A: A National Pork Board producer-led panel selected Validus and Audit, Review and Compliance (ARC) branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), based on the two organizations' experience in conducting on-farm verifications. Validus has conducted more than 6,000 environmental assessments and more than 1,000 swine, dairy, beef, poultry and egg animal well-being audits, assessments and verifications. ARC/USDA conducts third-party audits of contractors and raw materials suppliers for all beef, pork, lamb, bison and seafood purchases under the AMS Commodity Purchase Programs. Neither Validus nor ARC has regulatory authority.



Q: What is covered in the survey?

A: The verifier will conduct a survey to observe and evaluate the same care and well-being principles contained within the site assessment document that your advisor completed and submitted. The survey will not include any standards or content outside of what is found within the PQA Plus site assessment. For more information about what will be covered in the survey, please contact your advisor.

Q: Can a producer lose the site status designation as a result of the verification survey?

A: No. The survey is intended to shed light on the implementation of the PQA Plus program as a whole and to identify ways to improve the program.

Q: Can a producer decline to participate?

A: It is not mandatory that producers participate in a verification survey. However, this vital component of PQA Plus, approved by producer leadership in 2007 as part of the program's expansion, helps deliver on the promise of continuous improvement. Each producer asked to participate is encouraged to participate as a way to support our industry. Over time, the verification process will be a powerful way to demonstrate the collective commitment to responsible production.

Q: What happens to the survey results?

A: Results from all verification surveys will be examined in aggregate form to identify ways to improve the program's content and training methods. Data from individual sites will be kept strictly confidential. The National Pork Board will not have access to individual verification results. Also, the two vendors selected to complete the third-party verification will not keep a record of verification survey results. Producers will receive an official verification summary, including items of non-conformance, and will retain sole ownership and control over the distribution of individual data from their specific sites.

For more information on having your operation site assessed through PQA Plus, call the Pork Checkoff Service Center at (800) 456-7675.



"...I strongly urge pork producers to take this final step if selected."

Dale Norton, a farrow-to-wean pork producer from Bronson, Mich., and National Pork Board member

Do Your Part in PQA PLUS®

I recently renewed my Pork Quality Assurance® Plus (PQA Plus®) certification and have completed a PQA Plus site assessment, which serves as an extension of what you're already doing with your veterinarian, from ensuring proper stocking rates to keeping accurate medication records. The process takes the things you're already doing and puts them in a more formal format, helping identify ways to become an even more responsible pork producer.

For example, we made a few changes in pig handling following our site assessment. I make sure that my employees and I follow the PQA Plus guidelines when moving sows from the gestation barn to the farrowing barn. The site assessment confirmed that we are on the right track in other areas of our operation. Ammonia levels in my barn were in the acceptable range, reinforcing the value of investing a little extra money in electricity to provide adequate ventilation to keep the air fresh.

And now the third-party site verification component, outlined in this newsletter, is making the PQA Plus program even more beneficial to the pork industry and its stakeholders. Participation is voluntary, but I strongly encourage pork producers to commit to taking this final step if selected. The random surveys will be very similar to the site assessment component of PQA Plus and will reflect its Good Production Practices (page 2).

Several pork producers, including myself, helped select the two groups that will conduct the surveys, and I feel very comfortable with their knowledge and experience with the verification process. Since PQA Plus is all about continuous improvement, the surveys offer another way to prove what good caretakers we are, through a third-party process, and show our commitment to even better swine care.



This is a special-topic newsletter sent periodically to you by the Pork Checkoff

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