THE PORK QUALITY ASSURANCE® (PQA®) PROGRAM

Erik D. Risa
Manager, Certification Programs
National Pork Board
1776 NW 114th St.
Des Moines, IA 50325

Background
The Pork Quality Assurance® (PQA®) program was introduced in 1989 as a voluntary educational program to help producers reduce the drug residue levels being found in meat products. The PQA program was very effective and it soon became the pork industry’s flagship educational program.

As the pork industry’s customers began to increase their requests for documentation of animal care and well-being on the farm, the National Pork Board developed the Swine Welfare Assure Program® (SWAP®) to help producers voluntarily assess and document animal care and well-being on the farm.

Development of the “next step” in this continuous improvement process began in 2006 with the goal of combining the core food safety-related content from the PQA program with the on-farm animal care and well-being components of the SWAP program. The result of this effort was launched in June, 2007 as Pork Quality Assurance Plus™ (PQA Plus™). PQA Plus™, composed of ten Good Production Practices (GPPs) and an on-farm animal well-being assessment, is on a clear path to live up to, and surpass, the reputation established by its predecessors, the PQA and SWAP programs.

Purpose

• The program is a workable, credible and affordable solution to assure food safety and good animal care and well-being.

• PQA Plus will help meet the needs of the pork industry’s customers including restaurants, food retailers and consumers.

PQA Plus Positioning

• To put the pork industry in a position to demonstrate to its customers the industry’s commitment to providing the best possible care for its animals.

• To assure consumers they are purchasing the highest quality, safest product possible while emphasizing animal care and well-being.

PQA Plus Development
• The Pork Industry Animal Care Coalition, made up of pork producers, packers/processors, restaurants and food retailers, dedicated itself to finding a food-industry solution that would give confidence to consumers that U.S. Pork is produced in a way that respects animal well-being.
• It was developed to be a continuous improvement program and will be updated and refined on a regular basis.

Components

• PQA Plus merges the concepts of the previous PQA and SWAP programs, food safety and animal well-being, into three distinct components:
  o Individual certification through producer education
  o Site Status through on-farm site assessment
  o Opportunity for audit gives customer credibility

Introduction

• PQA Plus was introduced in June 2007.
• Individual certifications and Site Status will be on 3-year cycles.
• Current PQA Level III certification will be honored until it expires.

Terminology

Trainers and Advisors

• PQA Plus Trainers are trained by the National Pork Board to help recruit, train and manage PQA Plus Advisors.
• PQA Plus Advisors are trained and certified to provide training for individuals who wish to become PQA Plus certified as well as to conduct on-farm site assessments.

Individual Certification

• Individuals may become certified in PQA Plus by completing a PQA Plus training session conducted by a PQA Plus Advisor. This certification is valid for 3 years upon which time recertification must be completed.
• Individuals may also complete additional training in order to obtain a PQA Plus Site Self-Assessment Endorsement (described below). This endorsement is valid for up to 3 years and expires on the same date as their PQA Plus certification regardless of the date of endorsement.
• While PQA Plus is strictly a voluntary program, Pork Checkoff encourages everyone involved with the production and handling of pigs to become certified. PQA Plus certification, and the training provided, allows producers to review and enhance their animal caretaker skills along with an opportunity to demonstrate to the public, the commitment to the animals they care for and for the pork industry as a whole.

Site Status
• Site Status is granted to a site, identified by Premises ID, once a PQA Plus Advisor reports that an on-farm site assessment has been completed. Site Status is valid for a three-year period.

Site Status vs. Certification

• Site Status relates to a specific premises, not a person. Certification relates to an individual, not a premises. An individual can become certified without having a premises with Site Status or even having a connection with a site at all. However, to gain Site Status, a premises must have a PQA Plus certified individual associated with the site at the time the site assessment was conducted.

Site Assessment Process

What is a site assessment?

• An on-farm site assessment involves physically assessing a production site including reviewing records, facilities and equipment, and animal care and well-being practices. An assessment is required to obtain Site Status for a premises.

Who does the on-farm site assessment?

• An on-farm site assessment can be completed either by a PQA Plus Advisor or an individual who is associated with the site, is PQA Plus Certified, and holds a PQA Plus Site Self-Assessment Endorsement.

What is a Site Self-Assessment Endorsement?

• A PQA Plus certified individual may choose to complete additional training in order to obtain this endorsement which enables the individual to conduct a PQA Plus site self-assessment, of an operation they are directly associated with, on their own. In the event of a site self-assessment, a PQA Plus Advisor is only relied upon to conduct the endorsement training and to review the site assessment results and report completion of the site assessment to the National Pork Board.

Steps to Participate in PQA Plus

Steps required to obtain individual PQA Plus Certification:

1. Find an Advisor - Call the Pork Checkoff service center at 800-456-PORK (7675) between the hours of 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. (CDT) for assistance in locating a PQA Plus Advisor.
2. Attend Certification Training - Complete a training session with a PQA Plus Advisor. This may be a group training session or a one-on-one session. The Advisor will record your information with the National Pork Board and issue a PQA Plus certification card.

Steps required to obtain Site Status through an Advisor Site Assessment:
1. **Find an Advisor** - Call the Pork Checkoff service center at 800-456-PORK (7675) between the hours of 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. (CDT) for assistance in locating a PQA Plus Advisor.

2. **Pre-Assessment** – Discuss the operation with an Advisor and make arrangements for your Advisor to conduct a site assessment. Gather necessary records and other materials as requested by an Advisor prior to the assessment.

3. **Assessment** – Advisor conducts the site assessment. There must be an individual with a current PQA Plus certification associated with the site at the time of the assessment that can be designated as the representative PQA Plus contact.

4. **Post-Assessment** – Discuss the results of the assessment with an Advisor and make plans to address any items that the Advisor noted as needing improvement. The Advisor will record the successful completion of the assessment and issue the premises Site Status.

**Steps required to obtain Site Status through a Site Self-Assessment:**

1. **Find an Advisor** - Call the Pork Checkoff service center at 800-456-PORK (7675) between the hours of 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. (CDT) for assistance in locating a PQA Plus Advisor.

2. **Endorsement Training** – Specific training provided by an Advisor (in addition to PQA Plus certification training) and successful completion of an exam covering the site assessment process, is required for an individual to obtain a PQA Plus Site Self-Assessment Endorsement. This endorsement is required to conduct a site self-assessment.

3. **Pre-Assessment** – Discuss the operation with an Advisor and prepare for the site assessment. Gather necessary records and other materials as recommended by your Advisor prior to the assessment.

4. **Assessment** – Site Self-Assessment Endorsed individual conducts the site assessment on the premises that they are associated with. *Site self-assessments are only an option when there is a clear association between the Endorsed individual and the premises being assessed. An Endorsed individual cannot conduct site assessments for other parties.*

5. **Post-Assessment** – Discuss the results of the site self-assessment with an Advisor and make plans to address any items that you and your Advisor noted as needing improvement. The Advisor will record the successful completion of the assessment and issue the premises Site Status.