

Marketing Age and Source Verified Beef Cattle

The domestic and international market system has influenced the creation of a number of alliances and programs to address the demand for source and age verified beef cattle. Source and/or age verified programs utilize the RFID tag technology to record and verify the sources and ages of beef cattle to fit end use programs, such as the Japanese Beef Export Verification program and customer demand from Wal-Mart and McDonald's for verified product. Costs to producers for involvement in any of the private source and/or age verified programs will depend on the program the producer chooses to join; however, anticipated costs will include the tag and a database management fee charged by the national database company. The key elements of a source and/or age verified program include:

- Animal identification tag
- Source information (could be USDA premises identification number)
- Age information through some form of a birth date, birth month, birth quarter, etc.
- Data stored in a national database and records maintained at the ranch

Today, more and more downstream beef marketing programs are demanding that cattle be part of an auditable and verifiable program in order to better guarantee quality or attribute claims. Both USDA programs, Quality System Assessment (QSA) and Process Verified Program (PVP), are important for the industry and involve third party, USDA audits.

- QSA's provide suppliers of agricultural products such as processors or feedlots the opportunity to assure customers of their ability to provide consistent quality products. It is limited to programs or portions of programs where specified product requirements such as source or age are supported by a documented quality management system. Because of this, QSA's are often very specific in their defined claims and processes, and offer very little flexibility to individual participants.
- A process verified program is a quality management system that is implemented by a company or business entity to provide products or services which consistently meet specified product requirements. PVP's can cover a broader variety of claims and offer greater flexibility for participants to define their claims and processes, but in turn require a higher level of auditing. Because of the higher level of auditing associated with process verified programs, most packer and feedlot QSA's will accept cattle from a PVP supplier without requiring additional auditing, since the PVP is responsible for ensuring the auditability and verifiability of the participant's information.

Qualifying Cattle for Export to Japan

Calves must be enrolled in a Process Verified Program (PVP) or Quality Systems Assessment (QSA) program approved and audited by USDA in order to qualify for export to Japan. A number of data management companies, packing plants, and breed associations have PVP's in place for producers to join (See <http://processverified.usda.gov/>). Packing plants and feedyards are also establishing QSA programs (See <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/qsap.htm>). ***Be sure to check with your buyer and/or feeder to make sure you are meeting their QSA requirements or enroll your cattle in a PVP.***

Cattle enrolled in the Montana Beef Network qualify under the CattleLog PVP for source and age verification (<http://www.cattlelog.com/overview/pvp.htm>) if the following requirements are met:

- Cattle must be tagged with a RFID electronic tag.
- Source and age data must be uploaded to the eMerge database.
- The producer must request an audit from eMerge.
- The audit must be conducted before the calves leave the ranch of origin.