



BeefTalk 528: Worldly Communication Takes Third-party Verification

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Handshakes via Third-party

Third-party verification and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

"AMS provides producers and suppliers of agricultural products with the opportunity to ensure customers of the ability to provide consistent quality products and services. AMS accomplishes this by verifying the agency's clients' documented programs through independent, third-party audits"

www.ams.usda.gov

Simply put, the process must validate with total certainty that the claim is correct as defined by the USDA.

Third-party verification sounds and is very simple. For someone who wants assurances that others are doing what they say they are doing, you simply ask a third, unbiased person to validate the claims.

Even as early as grade school, a teacher may assign various students to projects but ask other students to oversee their work. When the teacher returns, he or she will ask those who were asked to oversee the project if all the proper procedures were followed while the students did the project. Only after the review was the project presented or submitted for a



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grade.

The same process is utilized by many agencies and companies to verify that the claims made by others are followed. Cattle source and age verification is no different. In the adult world of work, the process may get much more involved, but the basic concepts that were demonstrated in grade school do not change.

In the case of third-party verification for source and aged calves, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is verifying the claims that an individual producer is making about the birth place and date of the cattle. Not unlike many USDA programs, the USDA cannot reach out or physically be every place every day, so the USDA asks others to help verify the claims made by producers who wish to source and age their calves.

These "others" ultimately become third-party verifiers and expand the capacity of the USDA to assure that the claims are true. To be a third-party verifier, one could say there is a lot of flexibility to it. However, at the same time, one could say the process is very structured. Why two conflicting statements in one description?

Simply put, the process must validate with total certainty that the claim is correct as defined by the USDA. However, the process that is used to verify the claim is developed and proposed to the USDA by the third-party verifier. The verifier must follow the guidelines developed by the USDA. However, each third-party verifier may use a different approach to reach the end conclusion. Therefore, the USDA will audit the third-party verifiers to assure that the

process they developed accomplishes the goal of validating the source and age of an individual calf or a group of calves.

The same process of creating a chain of third-party verifiers who will follow the cattle throughout their lifetime and through the harvesting and marketing process must happen throughout the industry. The third-party verification will appear to be different from one verifier to the next, but the end conclusion always will be the same and meet the needs of the USDA.

That is why, at times, producers can be somewhat perplexed by the process. But being perplexed should be short-lived following a review of the process by going to <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/>. The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service provides assurances that the third-party verification process really is a very good and well-run system.

In general terms, USDA-AMS quality grade standards, grading, certification, auditing, inspection and laboratory analysis are voluntary tools that the industry can use to help promote and communicate quality and wholesomeness to consumers.

Individuals who wish to know more or perhaps even get involved with the third-party verification process can refer to the Quality Systems Verification Program (QSVP) general policies and procedures. The QSVP sometimes is referred to as the ARC 1000 procedure. This document outlines the responsibilities and requirements for services provided under the QSVP. The QSVP has various audit programs designed to provide independent verification that special processes and/or marketing claims are clearly defined and verified by an independent third-party.

The QSVP are voluntary, user-fee programs that are available to suppliers of agricultural products or services.

Most of us, if not all, end our conversations or agreements with a handshake, but traveling the world makes an actual handshake difficult. However, programs such as those run by the USDA-AMS allow for those handshakes to be passed on from state to state or country to country with satisfaction guaranteed. Third-party verification is a good, modern tool for communication around the world.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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