



## RESEARCH BRIEF PRODUCT QUALITY

## BEEF RESEARCH

### National Beef Quality Audit-2016: Phase 1, Face-to-face interviews

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### Abstract

The National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) is conducted every 5 yr and was most recently again conducted in 2016. Face-to-face interviews gauged progress in quality associated with live cattle production using procedures first utilized in NBQA 2011. The 2016 NBQA was the first in which interviews concerning fed steers and heifers were combined with an audit of market cow and bull beef. Face-to-face interviews were designed to illicit definitions for beef quality, estimate willingness to pay (WTP) for quality attributes, establish relative importance rankings for important quality factors, and assess images, strengths, weaknesses, potential threats, and shifting trends in the beef industry since the 2011 audit. Individuals making purchasing decisions in 5 market sectors of the steer/heifer and cow/bull beef supply chain were interviewed, including packers ( $n = 36$ ), retailers (including large and small supermarket companies and warehouse food sales companies;  $n = 35$ ), food service operators (including quick-serve, full-service, and institutional establishments;  $n = 29$ ), further processors ( $n = 64$ ), and peripherally-related government and trade organizations (GTO;  $n = 30$ ). Face-to-face interviews were conducted between January and November of 2016 using a designed dynamic routing system. Definitions (as described by interviewees) for 7 pre-determined quality factors, including: (1) How and where the cattle were raised, (2) Lean, fat, and bone, (3) Weight and size, (4) Visual characteristics, (5) Food safety, (6) Eating satisfaction, and (7) Cattle genetics were recorded verbatim and categorized into similar responses for analysis. Compared to NBQA-2011, a higher percentage of companies were willing to pay premiums for guaranteed quality attributes, but overall were willing to pay lower average premiums than the companies interviewed in 2011. Food safety had the highest share of preference among all interviewees, generating a double-digit advantage over any other quality factor. The 2 beef industries have an overall positive image among interviewees, and despite lingering weaknesses, product quality continued to be at the forefront of the strengths category for both steer and heifer beef and market cow and bull beef.

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