## Beef: Its for School Lunch:

## Addie Womack

## Season 1, Episode 49

[Intro music]

**Kiernan Brandt:**

Welcome to Cattle HQ, a podcast from industry experts and progressive producers discussing cutting edge info about the cow calf sector to keep cattlemen and women in the know and positively affect their bottom line.

**Madison Kovarna:**

Welcome to Cattle HQ, brought to you by South Dakota State University Extension. I am Madison Kovarna, a beef nutrition field specialists based out of Watertown. Joining me today is one of my coworkers, Addie Womack. Addie is SDSU Extension’s Livestock Production and Stewardship field specialist based out of Mitchell. She also has a very important role as South Dakota’s BQA, which is Beef Quality Assurance coordinator. Kind of a perfect topic to start one of our first episodes of 2025 getting people prepared for a new calving season, just a whole new year of possibility for our producers across the state. Addie, I wanted to first give you some time to offer us a quick introduction, who you are, where you're from, and maybe even what you do in your position.

**Addie Womack:**

All right. So, my name is Addie Womack. I grew up in Southwest Arkansas on a commercial cow-calf operation. That's still what my parents do. My mom has also started a flower farm. So, she's kind of - now that her kids are gone out of her house, she's able to explore her interests there on the farm. Then, I went to college in Arkansas at Arkansas Tech for my bachelor's degree and then on to Oklahoma State University for my Masters, which is in Ruminant Nutrition. Then, I started here with SDSU extension in February. So, I've almost made it a year in the state of South Dakota. I am still enjoying it, in case anybody is wondering. So, for Extension, I am the livestock production and stewardship field specialist. Like Madison said, I am the BQA coordinator. So, that is a big part of my job. Then, for other focuses, I'm still kind of figuring out my place here in the state and in working with the beef team, but I really am interested in the kettle handling aspect of things.

**Madison Kovarna:**

We're really glad that you've stuck around through South Dakota. Coming from down South, you definitely came at a cold time of year. We managed to keep you through that. So, I think you're pretty safe there, at least hopefully. For those of our loyal listeners who have maybe heard Addie talk before, she just published an episode not too long ago with another one of our SDSU staff about some mental health in the ag field. So, she definitely helps me out with the podcast quite a bit. I'm excited for her to kind of be the main focus for this one, but kind of the focus that we're going to shift to is Beef Quality Assurance or that BQA which Addie is our in-house expert for that. I wanted to ask you why producers should care about BQA. Are there any industry requirements for these certifications for our producers?

**Addie Womack:**

Yes. So, depending on how you choose to market your cattle, there may be some requirements as far as having that BQA certification. If you're selling to Tyson or Cargill, those are a few off the top of my mind that require feed yards that they purchase from to have that BQA certification. So then, some of those feed yards will then require who they get their cattle from. So, kind of a chain reaction of requiring that certification. If you're selling at your local sale barn or to your neighbor, they may not have that same expectation. However, at sale barn, sometimes, they'll advertise differently. They may use that as a marketing point or just an advantage proving to those buyers that you have - taking care of your cattle with BQA standards in mind, right? So, that creates kind of a sometimes a requirement feeling for producers when you look at the BQA program. So, it's something that you have to do, not necessarily something that you really want to do. I am really working to change that mindset and help producers to understand that, yes, sometimes, people are going to require that, and it's just a number, and you just want to get it, but there are so many benefits to going through the program and learning about the newest and best management practices for cattle.

**Madison Kovarna:**

Feel like all of us in the cattle industry can get so used to kind of going through that same schedule. We're always calving the same time of year, year to year pretty much, unless we make a big change or we're always giving vaccines at a certain time. All of that just becomes more of a routine than anything. I think BQA is a really nice job of bringing us back to our roots of why we decide to do those things that we do, why we handle cattle the way that we do, maybe why we're working around cattle the way that we are, your attitude, volume, your quickness. All of those things kind of come to light in BQA, but you kind of mentioned that it's a program and you have to go through it to get certified, but where can people go to get certified? Is it something that they can do in person? Do they have to visit with someone? Is there an online program? Kind of how does that work for them to go through and kind of be exposed to a BQA certification?

**Addie Womack:**

So, you can do the course online. If you go that route, it'll give you the option whether you want to kind of focus on cow-calf or feed yard stalker operation. It just changes the course just a little bit to kind of highlight what you are really interested in. Then, you can also do it in person. So, myself, Madison is a trainer and has hosted quite a few trainings recently. I've got a couple more. I guess we'll we'll tell you the dates later. So, stay tuned. Couple more trainings in person. Then, there are also several veterinarians across the state and other extension employees that can host these trainings. So, if you want one in your area and you haven't seen one advertise, you don't know if there's going to be one available, you can reach out to me. We can get one scheduled. Also, some of the veterinarians are scheduling ones. I don't think we've mentioned this yet, but they're good for - your certification is good for three years. So, a lot of times, if a veterinarian has hosted a training for their clients, then in the next three years, somebody will reach out and ask for another one of those trainings. So, if you attended one with your veterinarian, just kind of stay up to date with them because they may be planning on doing that routinely. I will say I push for coming to an in-person training as we talked about why should you be BQA certified. When you go to the in-person, you get that personal, the personal stories and connection to not just, “Here is the practice that we should be doing, but here is why we do that.” The online training is great. It's just a little less personal. You get less of those, that interaction with your trainer.

**Madison Kovarna:**

I was going to say I think that's my favorite part is when we all get together and get to kind of just make it more of a conversation. We're not getting to kind of get up in the front of the room and say that us trainers are better, but for any mark of the word, I mean we all still make mistakes and it's always nice for everybody to get together and kind of go through all those things. I think Addie puts on a pretty wicked training. She makes them pretty fun and interactive. So, if anybody's thinking of attending a training in person, whether you need to or it's something that just interests you, definitely reach out to Addie. She is doing a fantastic job of kind of scattering them around the state, and does a really nice job of keeping track of all of the trainers like myself who are off hosting trainings too. So, she's usually got her pulse on trainings happening from East to West border of the state, North and South as well in that aspect too. You were kind of giving us a little snapshot into the trainings as well of like what a typical in-person training looks like, but I was wondering if you could maybe talk a little bit more about the topics that you would cover in those trainings and maybe how long they are as well as - we mentioned that they can contact you if they're looking for anyone to attend, but is there any other places that maybe they can look to see if there's a BQA training going on in their area?

**Addie Womack:**

Yes. So, we'll start with where people can find trainings. If an Extension person is hosting the training, then we try to post those on our website and also allow for you to RSVP on there through the website. If it's your veterinarian, it's just kind of up to them how they go about marketing that. If they let me know in enough time and are willing to open it up to the public, sometimes, we'll post those on the website as well. You may just have to contact your veterinarian though if that's the route that you're looking to go. We also try to have them advertised with the Cattlemen's, the South Dakota Cattlemen's newsletter. They're really good about letting us put those on there. Sometimes, we'll send out flyers. Then, what we really have been trying to do though is going through and - for example, there's going to be a training in Watertown in January. So, we'll go through and look at people in that general area that their certification is about to expire or has recently expired, and we’ll try to get you an e-mail. So, also, be checking your emails. The national team will send out reminders as to when your certification is about to expire. So, look for those. Sometimes, I think it comes from a pretty generic looking e-mail but if it's got BQA in it, check on it. Okay? Then, the in-person trainings, we shoot for about two hours from start to finish. A lot of times, when we provide these, we'll have a snack or a meal or something like that. So, we will not talk to you for two hours straight. I assure you. However, we do have to cover some main topics that are a requirement of the program, right? So, we'll give you an introduction of the program and then discuss behavior in cattle handling, which is probably the most interesting part to me. Like I mentioned earlier, that's a really cool section that you kind of learn about the why and understanding how the cattle are thinking, and which leads into why we want to handle them that way. So, it's not just, “Hey, do it this way and not that way.” Then, we talk about biosecurity which in the event of any kind of outbreak, you kind of want to have - disease outbreak. You kind of want to have some biosecurity practices in place and herd health management that includes injection, site management to nutrition and kind of everything in between on that topic, transportation. I will add in here that even though we do talk about transportation in the BQA training, this will not get you certified for BQA transportation. That's a different separate training. So, then we talk about record keeping, and environmental quality control points, worker safety, and emergency action planning. So, if there were any kind of emergency on your operation, we want to make sure that you have the materials and a plan in place to be able to safely handle that situation.

**Madison Kovarna:**

Yes. So, you brought up an excellent point that - I mean I've gotten asked the question a few times. So, I can only imagine how many times has come through your phone or through your e-mail to you, but BQA transportation or BQAT, I'm sure some people have referred to it, it's got two sections if I'm not mistaken. I want to say it's like a commercial driver and then a farmer rancher but different part. If someone's interested in maybe going a little bit further into the transportation part, kind of how would that work for a producer or for even just a semi driver who's a little curious?

**Addie Womack:**

Yes. So, as of right now, we don't have any of the transportation trainings scheduled in-person, but I have had quite a few people ask about that recently. So, I'm working on being able to offer those hopefully very soon. So, be on the lookout for those through all the same channels I talked about earlier. You can currently do that online as well though. You were right. There are two different options. So, if you or like a hauling cattle commercially or in a semi-truck. Then, there's a certification for that. Then, there's also one for - if you're just taking your own animals yourself from point A to point B.

**Madison Kovarna:**

I was going to say. Sometimes, that transportation, they split it up. Some people aren't really sure where they land. Usually, I think it's just kind of the smaller pieces, but I'm sure if anybody was really having heartburn about kind of which one they needed to fall in, I'm sure you'd be happy to answer their questions if you don't mind me kind of advertising you to the world for them to kind of come for you for everything, I suppose.

**Addie Womack:**

No. Give me a call.

**Madison Kovarna:**

She's always a good time to talk to you. Sometimes, I'll just call her just to chat for a while too. So, even if it's kind of relates to other topics outside of BQA, anything really cattle production, and just being a good steward of your livestock is something that she has a deep passion for as she said earlier in this little episode, but outside of the typical, the training, and the certification we talked about you do the training, it lasts you three years before you got to come back and see someone who's hosting a training, but what are some things that outside of BQA that in your position as the livestock production and stewardship field specialists, you're really hoping to bring to South Dakota and maybe offer to our producers as well?

**Addie Womack:**

I am currently working on hopefully getting a stewardship kind of based conference planned out. That would entail some land stewardship and also some livestock stewardship. So, that is in the works. Aside from that, I'm hoping to get some cattle handling resources available to you guys this coming year. At the end of our year as Extension employees, we have to set some programming goals for ourselves. So, those were a couple of mine. So, I better achieve those.

**Madison Kovarna:**

The boss might come after you if you drop the ball.

**Addie Womack:**

Yes. So, I've got those in the works.

**Madison Kovarna:**

I always think that just being a good steward of not only livestock, but you even mentioned the land isn't something that you know how to do your entire life. You're always learning how to be a better steward. You're always learning how to better care for your livestock and manage your land better in this environment where we're starting to be really limited on our land resources that our cattle can run on. We're kind of condensing that down having to be more productive on smaller areas of land collectively. I think it's really important to keep in mind that we're not just in the cattle business. I mean that's my favorite part of working with cattle producers, but cattle rely just as much on pastureland, crop land, all of those things. So, we really need to make sure that we're keeping the land in the front of our minds as well. I guess really the other things that I kind of wanted us to chat with you about during our time together was just maybe some things - I don't know if you've gotten any questions from people about certain animal handling topics or anything that maybe is just been intriguing to you being new to the area or just kind of new in your position either, if there's anything that was kind of a fun little tidbit that you wanted to share that maybe just come up in the last however long you kind of want to dig back for.

**Addie Womack:**

Yes. I actually got a call. It's been a little while ago now. Someone was reaching out and hoping to get some help with redesigning their working facilities. That was really fun. I had never actually got to sit down and and work on that. We read all these different things and learn about it, but to actually help someone do it, that was pretty fun. Just being or moving somewhere so far away - whenever I started this position, I was - in my interview process, I was telling my parents I was really worried that they would think that I didn't know enough about producing cattle in South Dakota because it is different than like in Arkansas or Oklahoma where I've spent a majority of time. My dad was like, “Addie, the basics are the same.” They are the basics of taking care of your animals and raising livestock are the same no matter where you are, but learning the specifics and the differences between here and what I grew up with has been really interesting and really kind of broadened my horizons. So…

**Madison Kovarna:**

The building of cattle facilities, I don't - I mean we kind of talked about it a little bit in the in-person training kind of PowerPoint that we run through, but I feel like kind of diving into the nitty gritty of that, I would honestly be kind of - I think I'd nerd out even a little bit like you did. What I’m saying like there's a lot of things that you can really think about from angles, and sunlight, and all of those things. I think that that would be just a really fun conversation to talk through if what your system has is maybe the best that works for you. So, I'm really glad that person reached out. Hopefully, this new system is working better than they could have imagined, right?

**Addie Womack:**

Yes.

**Madison Kovarna:**

Also, I really liked how you mentioned that even though where you're from in Arkansas and South Dakota are two completely different beasts, I mean you really can't compare apples to apples there, but the basics are the same like you said. I think that really goes into your passion for teaching BQA because we're going back to those basics and really kind of getting back into it. So, I really appreciate that you brought that up because you're right. I mean it is. You're raising cattle in a humane and honest way [[Unintelligible]](https://recordings.civi.com/cgi-bin/player.php?file=PC-00002-CattleHQ-Ep49.mp3&starttime=1288&duration=20) where you live, I guess, is kind of the the thought process there as well.

**Addie Womack:**

Okay. I'm just going to add on to what you just said about raising cattle in a safe way. I don't think I really talked about this earlier, but to me, that is the biggest point that BQA is making right now. If you've heard me do any kind of other interview or discussion where I talk about BQA, you've probably heard this. So, I apologize, but really just ensuring the confidence of the consumer. Right now, people are getting further and further from the farms. Fewer people are being raised in an agriculture environment. There's just kind of a lack of understanding about how we raise animals, and that the producers really do care about the welfare of our animals. If you think about your operation is a business, then your cattle are your employees. If you want those to produce the best, most efficient way they can for you, why would you ever treat them inhumanely? So, that's another layer to this as the producer. If you were ever questioned about how you raise your animals or anything like that, you can fall back on this program. You don't necessarily have to be a producer to go through the program. So, anybody that just wanted to understand what principles that we face raising animals off of could go through this and kind of gain that understanding.

**Madison Kovarna:**

I think that's a great point that you just brought up that. I mean innately, we always default to producers are going to be the one that we're working with because I mean they're the ones inadvertently that are getting the tap on the shoulder that say, “Hey, you need to do this,” but for anybody outside of the industry that's just wanting kind of to look through the looking glass into what we're teaching our people how to raise the food that gets to their plate, I think it's a really insightful training whether you come in person to actually talk with the people who raise cattle in your area or if you just kind of do it online at your own pace and go through the various sections and stuff. Speaking of sections that kind of relate to producers, maybe one of our last questions before we have to sign off as we're nearing the end of our time is there are some things on the BQA website called continuing education or kind of those continuing credits. Can you explain to maybe if a producer has been online and has maybe seeing those things floating around what those are for?

**Addie Womack:**

Yes. So, like we talked about earlier, the BQA certification is good for three years. So, whether you do it online or in person, if you create a profile online, you can go in. No, you can't like day after you complete the program, go in and and do all of your continuing education credits. You have to wait a little while before those are available to you. Then, you can go in and go through those. They are kind of - you put a magnifying glass on a certain topic that is in the the General BQA program. So, we'll say biosecurity for example. If you go through the biosecurity continuing education credit, it's going to be a shorter program, but it's just all focused on biosecurity. So, if you get a couple of these between your - from the time you got certified until you're due, that will actually renew you. So, you wouldn't have to go through nor like the standard three-year training again. Those would qualify you for the next three years. Then, we are working on offering some of those in person but just like the standard BQA, there has to be a test. You have to kind of highlight a certain set of information standards, if that makes sense. So, we're still figuring out the kinks on getting those offered in person, but I think that's really valuable to the program because it adds another opportunity for people to get certified or renew that certification. It also focuses on more in depth on these different topics.

**Madison Kovarna:**

I think - I mean no one is going to necessarily, I'm sure, throw a fit about coming to see us every three years for an in-house training.

**Addie Womack:**

No.

**Madison Kovarna:**

Of course not. Why would they? We're a blast, but those continuing education credits can definitely lessen the load if coming to those in-person trainings just doesn't really work super nicely in your schedule, but just making sure you stay on top of it and keep in contact with Addie about what your certification deadlines looking like if you're getting close. All of those things. As we near the end of our time together, Addie, I wanted to kind of give you the floor if you want it to kind of maybe give us some closing thoughts before we sign off.

**Addie Womack:**

I think I'll just provide the dates of a few trainings that are coming up. So, we will have a training February 13th at the Watertown Farm Show. Another one towards the end of February. That one will be in Beresford at the research station.

**Madison Kovarna:**

If anybody that's listening is up in Watertown, you'll definitely see some of my blue and yellow BQA flyers hanging around town at some places. I know for sure I've got some up kind of at clinic and also at the sale barn. Addie's contact information both her office phone as well as her e-mail are on there as well. So, if you see any of those floating around, you can get her contact information from there. Otherwise, you can find it on our extension website and then also probably in the link to this episode. So, you'll be able to get in contact with Addie and she'll be happy to chat with you. Addie, I wanted to thank you for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It's nice to have you on maybe the other end kind of getting to tell us your story, kind of where you come from, and also just the importance of the things you do for us here at Extension as our BQA coordinator and our production and stewardship field specialist. BQA is necessary for the success of the beef industry as consumers search for more clarity in how their food reaches their plates. It's not a difficult process to become certified at all. In fact, you can see Addie, myself, your local veterinarian, really a whole lot of people across the state host these. It is definitely worth the investment of your time. If you have any questions regarding Beef Quality Assurance, don't hesitate to reach out to Addie. Like I said, her contact information is on our web page. With that, this has been Cattle HQ brought to you by SDSU Extension, headquarters for all things beef cattle. Visit extension.sdstate.edu for the latest beef information. Until the next episode. Stay curious and keep learning.

**Kiernan Brandt:**

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