

**Oink, Oink: Using Youth Pork Quality Assurance® Plus as an Industry Credential to Enhance Secondary Students' Swine Science Content Knowledge**

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## **Introduction**

The distinct need exists for a technically competent and agriculturally-literate workforce that is prepared to tackle the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016). Members of the emerging agricultural workforce should be prepared to address a wide variety of future needs and concerns, particularly as changes continue to affect whole industries (Roberts et al., 2016). Such changes include additional regulations, workforce development-related issues, educating the public at large, and more (Roberts et al., 2016). Regarding workforce expectations for the nation's youth, many employers expect employees to be capable of a wide range of skills, particularly in the livestock industries (Slusher, Robinson, & Edwards, 2011). Further, employers often desire employees to possess a degree of proficiency within these skills (Slusher et al., 2011). Perhaps a student credentialing option that includes technical animal agriculture content knowledge and livestock-oriented skills could provide help to fill gaps between literacy and workforce development needs for secondary students.

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act (Perkins IV) of 2006 set in place requirements for career and technical education (CTE) programs, such as school-based agricultural education (SBAE), to offer additional educational opportunities, such as credentials recognized by industry stakeholders, that prepared students to enter directly into specific career areas (Perkins IV, 2006). The ultimate goal of these credentials has been to improve the technical and academic preparation of students to enter in to the world beyond secondary education and provide employers with qualified employees (Perkins IV, 2006). Such potential benefits of credentialing can include assisting students who seek entry-level skilled employment in industry, increased understanding of both technical and academic content, and developing greater likelihood of early career success (National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (NRCCTE), n.d.). Based upon these needs, as well as a possible solution to combat workforce development deficiencies, it is conceivable that the use of student credentials could aid the agricultural industry in preparing a skilled and knowledgeable workforce for the future. One such option may be the Youth Pork Quality Assurance® (PQA) Plus program.

## **How it Works**

As described by the National Pork Board (2017), Youth PQA Plus®, as originally intended for young producers between the ages of eight and 19 years, “is the food safety, antibiotic use, and animal well-being awareness and education program” (§ 1) used to educate students in and about swine science content. Moreover, the methods used for Youth PQA Plus® include online, face-to-face, and hybridized trainings. Online training includes the completion of various modules related to swine production, care, and management, a written test, and, pending successful completion of the final online test, a certification is granted that lasts for a range of one to three years, depending upon student age level. It should be noted that certification levels are Beginner (ages eight to 11), Intermediate (ages 12 to 14), and Advanced (ages 15 to 19). Face-to-face training involves “training from certified Youth PQA Plus advisors who have received training from certified Youth PQA Plus (state) trainers or complete the online learning

and certification process” (§ 2). After training, students are administered a written examination based on the content covered during the session. Successful completion of the certification course and subsequent test grants students a certification that is valid for several years. Students are also able to complete a hybrid training regimen that consists of successfully completing an online module and passing a written examination; successful completion within this option also results in a multiple-year certification (National Pork Board, 2017).

During the 2014-2015 academic year, the agricultural education teacher at Fayette County High School (FCHS) in Fayette, Alabama implemented the Youth PQA Plus® student certification program within his Veterinary Science course. During a two-week period of time, students used school-provided laptop computers and Internet access to complete all of the online modules, which ranged from animal care to feeding to handling and transportation. It typically took approximately one class period of 50 minutes to complete each module, though some modules were greater in length and depth than others. Upon the completion of all of the modules, students were granted access to the certification examination, in which students were allowed up to three opportunities to earn the minimum passing score of 70%. A large majority of the 18 course students successfully earned their Advanced-level Youth PQA Plus® certification. This process was replicated during the 2015-2016 academic year with three sections of the Fundamentals of Agriscience course. Within the animal science unit of each of these courses, 63 students completed all of the Youth PQA Plus® modules, with a vast majority of the students earning either an Intermediate- or Advanced-level certification. As a result of these efforts, a total of 81 students were, over the course of two years, exposed to a variety of swine science content and skills through the use of this resource.

### **Implications**

Anecdotally, many of the students enjoyed learning about a livestock species not currently widely produced throughout western Alabama. Further, several students expressed an interest in working with swine in the future, often within the context of class animal science projects or showing swine. From the teacher’s perspective, students were engaged in increasing their knowledge about swine science while concurrently earning an industry-recognized credential, with such knowledge and skills being transferable to other species as well.

### **Future Plans & Advice to Others**

It is expected that the agricultural education teacher at FCHS will continue to offer the Youth PQA Plus® certification program within the program’s animal science coursework. Future plans to incorporate the Beef Quality Assurance™ (BQA) program exist as well. To better provide livestock industry-recognized credentials and curricula, perhaps such programming could serve other agricultural education programs in developing students’ content knowledge and skills as related to animals, as described by Slusher et al. (2011).

### **Costs**

Because laptop computers and Internet access were provided by the local school district, the SBAE program bore no costs directly associated with using the Youth PQA Plus® program.

## References

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