

Animal ID:

WHERE WE ARE

WHERE WE'RE GOING

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The need for full animal identification has never been more apparent. Getting there will be a major undertaking.

BY ALLEN BRIGHT

In the first months of 2004, talk within the industry has been peppered with words like "radio frequency technology" and "premises ID," and acronyms like "USAIP." What are the facts surrounding this issue and how will it affect our operations?

Support for a nationwide animal identification system is widespread, and producers generally agree animal ID is a critical component of our national animal health infrastructure. What is not widely known, however, is how much work has already been done on this issue.

In early 2002, the National Institute for Animal Agriculture organized a national identification task force to help prepare the National Identification Work Plan. The plan was presented at the 2002 U.S. Animal Health Association (USAHA) meeting, and participants resolved to ask USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to establish a joint state, fed-

eral, and industry group to further advance the work. Throughout 2003, the resulting National Identification Development Team composed of approximately 100 animal and livestock industry professionals representing more than 70 associations, organizations, and government agencies, continued the work and produced the draft of the U.S. Animal Identification Plan (USAIP).

The USAIP, when fully operational, will facilitate tracing an animal or group of animals back to the herd or premises that is the most logical source of a health concern. It will also be able to trace potentially exposed animals that were moved out from that herd or premises. The plan's objective is to establish a system that can complete the traces (back and forward) within 48 hours of an animal health incident.

This capability will be dependent on a practical yet comprehensive infrastructure that collects and records the

movements of animals. The identification of premises (production locations) is the foundation of the system, and must be established before animals can be tracked. These premises will be identified by state veterinarians and the industry. The USAIP defines the standards and framework for implementing and maintaining this system, including a premises numbering system and an individual and group/lot animal numbering system used for animal identification.

TRACKING TECHNOLOGIES

The plan is flexible and will be able to include existing systems. At the minimum, animals will need a visual tag with the appropriate numbers clearly printed on the tag.

However, technology will play an important role as the plan moves forward and becomes adopted by the industry. Among advanced identification methods, radio frequency identification

(RFID) is the most common for livestock when individual animal ID will be needed. Other technologies (rumen boluses, DNA, biometrics/retinal scans, nose prints, subcutaneous chips, etc.) can be integrated into the USAIP as practical applications of the technology are presented to the industry.

The standards defined in the USAIP allow the opportunity for multiple manufacturers and service providers to participate in the program, or for producers to use existing state, breed, or industry programs if they meet the USDA defined standards. NCBA policy calls for a program which is open to all technologies provided they meet the USAIP standards. Another benefit to multiple technologies and providers will be lower costs to producers due to competition within the market.

However, it's important to remember that the tags used to identify animals are just one component of the total system. Producers will be able to select from a variety of hardware and software offered by a number of companies. Therefore, compatibility between electronic tags and readers is essential, something the industry is fully aware of. And the electronic tags won't hold any information beyond the assigned premise and individual identification numbers. Information about the animal will be stored on a computer with software designed for this purpose.

The premise identification number will be the first number cattlemen will have to use. It will likely be seven character alphanumeric and each location that produces cattle will have its own unique number.

The administration and maintenance of premise ID lies with each state's animal health department. State animal health departments will use a national mechanism to get a unique

national premise ID and will record additional information such as type of premise and contact name, address and phone number. This information will be sent to the national premise database to be used in the case of a disease traceback.

In addition, the plan calls for individual or group/lot numbers. The individual animal number will permit a single animal to be identified with a lifetime number that can be printed on a visual tag, coded into a RFID transponder, or a combination of both. If animals will be sold as a group or lot and not split up, they can be assigned a group/lot identification number,

mentation. USDA Secretary Ann Veneman announced in January 2004 that \$46 million is being allotted for surveillance, testing and animal ID, which will provide a good start toward developing the necessary infrastructure.

Government and industry agree that one entity shouldn't bear the financial burden alone, and a cost share program between federal government and producers seems a logical course of action. Obviously, an effective animal ID system will benefit producers, consumers and government by ensuring better tracking of food animals, and a more secure agriculture



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which will consist of the premise ID number and a six digit numeric number reflecting the date the group was created.

COSTS

Preliminary projections estimate that costs could reach \$500 million over several years during initial imple-

economy, so each should bear a fair share of the costs. NCBA members voted to direct NCBA to work with Congress and the Bush Administration to ensure that APHIS, state animal health agencies, and producers secure the necessary funds to properly implement the USAIP.

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TIMEFRAME

The USAIP implementation plan provides for a phased-in approach to implementation of a national ID system. The proposed timeframe calls for methods to be in place within the government so that initial premises IDs can be issued by the end of 2004. But this timeframe is dependent on USDA making funds and resources available, and building the necessary infrastructures.

PRODUCER CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of identification data remains one of the greatest concerns of producers. Cattle industry representatives on the USAIP are aware of this concern, and NCBA is aggressively communicating to USDA and members of Congress that any animal ID plan implemented must be explicitly exempt from Freedom of Information Act requests for any information collected under the national animal identification program.

MANDATORY OR VOLUNTARY

The plan contains no mandatory requirements at this point in its development. Eventually, as the plan is finalized and tested, all livestock and food animals will be able to be tracked through the system. Not all animals, however, will need to be individually identified if they are raised, fed, and harvested as a group. In that case, they can be identified with a group/lot identification number.

SPECIES WORKING GROUPS

Some features of the plan are common to all species, while others are species specific. Species working groups are meeting to further define their needs and develop transition and implementation plans to include in the USAIP. NCBA is coordinating the work of the bovine species group.

IMPORTED ANIMALS

Animals entering the U.S. from other countries will be subject to the same identification and tracking procedures as animals already in the country. The identification devices that are on animals entering the U.S. will remain on the animals and used as part of the program. The Canadian identification program is compatible with the USAIP.

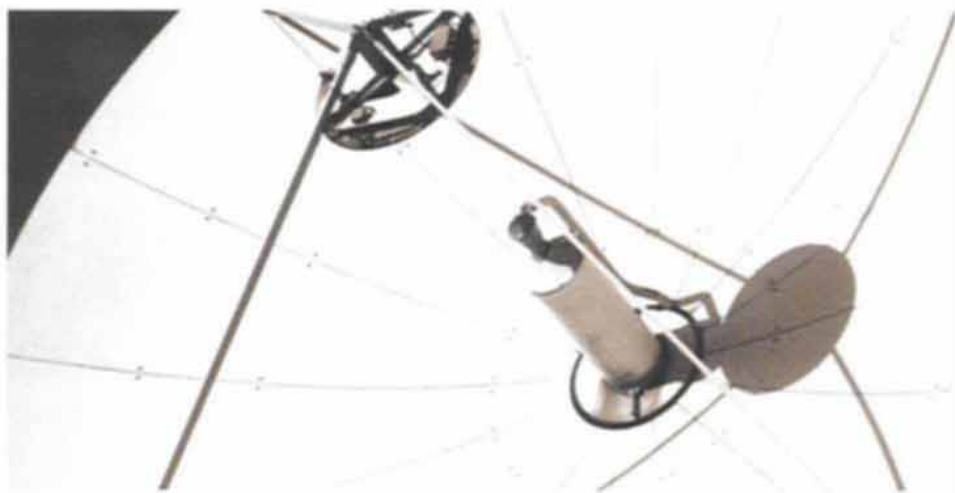
ANIMAL ID NOT NEW

The need to identify animals is, of course, not new to cattlemen. It is as old as the industry itself and much of the history of cattle raising revolves around branding time. Electronic technology, however, is fairly new and recent advances open new possibilities for cattlemen.

The first commercial use of electronic animal identification in cattle came in the '80s when dairy producers hung electronic "necklaces" on cows to be read by antennae in the milking parlor. This is now a standard practice in dairy operations both large and small.

Adapting the technology to the more rugged and less controlled environments of beef cattle production has taken some time. However, these factors have been overcome and electronic identification is practical and affordable.

For information on the U.S. Animal Identification Plan, go to www.usaip.info, which contains the latest version of the plan, plus additional information that explains the plan and answers frequently asked questions. ■



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LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

During the first few months of 2004, a number of bills had been introduced dealing with various aspects of animal ID. It's likely that even more bills will be introduced as time goes on.

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“Maintaining the health of the U.S. herd is the most urgent issue.... Keeping our herd healthy is good for animal producers and for their customers.”

(continued from page 22) NCBA and TCFA have worked hard to educate members of Congress about the U.S. Animal Identification Plan and the work that USDA and industry have put into the plan to make it not only useful in achieving the goal of 48-hour traceback in the event of an animal health outbreak, but practical and useful for cattlemen.

NCBA and TCFA think that USDA already has significant authority to proceed with implementation of an animal ID system and major legislation is likely not necessary. NCBA and TCFA continue to monitor all legislation introduced and any developments relative to USDA's existing authority to ensure that any measures passed by Congress agree with industry policy and help cattlemen achieve their goals in the USAIP.

“Maintaining the health of the U.S. herd is the most urgent issue,” according to Neil Hammerschmidt, identification coordinator with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Veterinary Services. “Having a system that can trace back a potentially diseased animal within 48 hours is critical to successfully respond to animal health issues. Keeping our herd healthy is good for animal producers and for their customers.”

NCBA and TCFA recognize the need for an animal identification plan that is an effective disease surveillance and monitoring tool which serves the needs of cattlemen. Significant effort by NCBA and TCFA, its volunteer leaders, and other state affiliates have played a big role in developing the U.S. Animal Identification Plan (USAIP). And significant effort by NCBA and TCFA will continue to be necessary as the plan is finalized and implemented. Rest assured that this is a top priority by both organizations and that both will work tirelessly to represent cattlemen's interest as the plan unfolds. 