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What Should Producers Be Doing Now About Animal Identification?

Forty-eight hour traceback for animal health monitoring and herd security have been much discussed for the past six months following the single case of BSE last December. The framework for the joint industry and government plan to implement a national animal identification system in the U.S. is contained in the United States Animal Identification Plan (U.S. AIP). Previous U.S. AIP working plans contained a three-phased approach for implementation, including registration of livestock premises by July 2004, individual/group identification of cattle for interstate commerce by July 2005 and intrastate commerce by July 2006, and adoption of radio frequency identification (RFID) technology in slaughter plants and state licensed markets by July 2005. These targeted goals for implementation, combined with USDA's announcement to rapidly advance national identification and various congressional bills in support of animal identification, likely have many livestock producers wondering what they should be doing now to prepare for identification.

The targeted goals above have been somewhat revised, but plans do continue for animal identification. Phase I goals now include continued work on framing animal identification plans. Phase II includes implementation of animal identification as pilot projects in selected states or regions. Phase III would then implement animal identification at the national level. Work on Phase I is currently ongoing by industry and government, and plans are being made for Phase II. Producers should remember that at this point animal identification is a voluntary program, and that they are not required to take action now. This provides an opportunity for producers to learn about the national animal identification system and explore potential opportunities individual animal identification could offer their operation.

The first step to animal identification, registering livestock premises, will be relatively easy and likely almost costless to producers. In many Great Plains and western cattle states, premises identification may occur later this year. Procedures will differ across states, but producers will likely apply for their premises number through their state department of agriculture, Farm Service Agency office, Extension Educator, or veterinarian by providing their name, contact information, and the location of livestock premises. This premises identification number will eventually be linked to individual animal identification numbers to determine animals' location.

Producers in states or regions where pilot programs are initiated as part of Phase II will have the opportunity to participate in individual animal identification. Likely, RFID technology will be used. This is expected to include tagging cattle with RFID tags and recording movement of animals from premises to premises. It will also allow producers to collect individual animal data on productivity, health treatments, progeny, etc., although this information would not be submitted to government databases. Producers likely will use third party technology providers that offer software solutions and RFID readers to collect and manage large volumes of individual animal data. The technology currently available on the market is impressive, and like most new technologies, is changing rapidly. Now is a good time for producers to begin learning about options for electronic RFID readers and computer hardware and software requirements. Likely by the time producers do invest in these items, the technology will have improved even more or

the cost will be lower. The key thing for producers to keep in mind is that they are not required to keep production records or any information other than animal location for the national animal identification system. However, many producers will likely couple compliance with animal identification with the opportunity to collect additional information about their herds. Before investing in a system to generate this information, producers should first consider what information they want on an individual head basis, what management decisions they expect to be influenced by or want to be able to make with this information, and whether those management decisions could net their operation more profit.

Additional information about the U.S. AIP program is available at <http://www.usaip.info>. A short summary of the working plan can be found at <http://agecon.unl.edu/mark/papers>. Visit <http://www.beefstockerusa.org> for information on available RFID technologies and to estimate the cost of RFID for your operation. Many university cooperative extension services, state departments of agriculture, and cattlemen associations will also host educational events as plans for animal identification advance.

The Markets

Slaughter cattle prices were sharply higher last week, with good cash movement in Nebraska and Kansas and strong demand for fed cattle. In Kansas, live prices were \$4-5 higher. Dressed prices in Nebraska advanced \$8-9 last week. Choice boxed beef prices increased almost \$1 last week while the Choice-Select spread declined \$0.81. Prices for 700-800 lb. steers were \$1-2 higher in Kansas and Nebraska last week on small volume. Steer calf prices (500-600 lb.) were lightly tested in Nebraska and Kansas last week as well.

	Last Week	Previous Week	Last Year
Kansas Fed Steer Price, live weight (35-65% Choice)	\$89.40	\$84.87	\$79.64
Neb. Fed Steer Price, dressed weight (35-65% Choice)	\$143.68	\$135.45	\$126.57
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Kansas 4 market average	\$111.45*	\$109.66	\$87.98
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Kansas 4 market average	\$124.75*	\$120.02	\$98.00
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Neb. 7 market average	\$116.97*	\$115.50	\$91.46
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Neb. 7 market average	\$139.55*	\$128.15	\$108.93
Choice Boxed Beef Price, 600-750 lb. carcass	\$150.43	\$149.49	\$149.18
Choice-Select Spread, 600-750 lb. carcass	\$15.72	\$16.53	\$15.95

* Small volume.