

National ID: It's about market access

■ *Western DairyBusiness* talks to Neil Hammerschmidt about a national ID system and how producers can help develop it.

Western DairyBusiness: What is the current state of food animal ID in the U.S.?

Neil Hammerschmidt: An animal identification crisis looms ... at issue is time! Ironically the dwindling of ID in the United States is a result of our successful animal disease eradication programs. Where a high percent of the U.S. dairy herd was identified years ago through the brucellosis vaccination program, only about 20 percent of the female calves carry the orange vaccinated ear tag today.

One of the key national efforts is a national stakeholder task force addressing food animal identification issues sponsored by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture. The multi species task force has representation from the entire production chain and is aggressively working on the "framework" for a national identification plan to be distributed and reviewed late 2002.

WDB: Why is animal ID important to milk producers?

Hammerschmidt: Dollars; it's about market access! It is important to acknowledge that animal ID will not prevent the incursion of a foreign animal disease. However, its merit is the infrastructure it brings for responding to animal disease issues. While many dairy producers have individual ID within their herd, the need for unique individual identification beyond the farm gate is necessary to meet the needs of animal disease surveillance, monitoring, control, and eradication programs.

In the event of a highly contagious disease outbreak, timely response is critical to "get ahead" of the problem. The longer it takes to determine the source of the disease, the more it spreads and the more devastating it becomes. With an appropriate response system, the disease can be contained and marketing products can resume in non-infected areas. Without an adequate ID system, the market channels can be closed longer and the geographic parameters increase. The denial of markets for our products is one of the most significant justifications why the entire animal agriculture industry must get on board and implement a national ID system.

WDB: What does "national ID" really mean?

Hammerschmidt: Today we cannot justify the cost of stand alone programs: separate ones for disease, performance recording, commerce, etc. National ID allows for the compatibility of systems through the utilization of standards, allowing information to flow efficiently among segments of the industry to meet various needs.

WDB: Will the system be producer-friendly, especially for large-herd producers?

Hammerschmidt: Yes, if the industry gets involved! That is, producers need to take charge by participating in industry groups and initiatives that are taking proactive measures. The government is expecting industry to take the lead; thus, the outcome will reflect our ability to unite and make progress as an industry.

WDB: How much might the system cost and who will pay?

Hammerschmidt: The stakeholders need to define the capability requirements of the system. One of the important questions being asked is, "In the event of an outbreak of a foreign animal disease, how long should a traceback take?" Or more clearly stated, "How long is it acceptable to have marketing channels closed; i.e., how long can I have my dairy 'shut down'?"

In an FMD scenario, health officials suggest a one-to-two day traceback system. If risk analysis justifies this capability, we'll need an extensive animal tracking system, and to accomplish it will require electronic ID. Providing safe food for U.S. consumers is a national issue and its cost above value-based marketing opportunities must be funded by those who benefit – the consumer.

WDB: What can producers do now?

Hammerschmidt: Most important might be to obtain a clear understanding on the issue of "national ID". It's not an issue of "big brother"; it is an issue of staying in business. Producers need to get the facts. I'm confident we'll realize how important this is and we'll then have good participation in the process. We must get this done together across animal agriculture! ■



Neil Hammerschmidt

FYI

■ Neil Hammerschmidt is President and COO of the newly formed Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium, a broad industry organization striving to make timely progress for the implementation of a food animal information system that supports a national program.

■ Hammerschmidt chairs the National Food Animal Identification Task Force, coordinated by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture. Task force reports can be viewed at www.animalagriculture.com.

■ See more information about the Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium at WisconsinLivestockID.com or call (608) 848-5237.