

## **Livestock Identification — The FSIS Perspective**

*By Dan Lazenby  
Veterinary Medical Officer  
USDA Food Safety & Inspection*

Improving the safety of meat and poultry products requires cooperative action across the entire food continuum.... from live animal production on the farm, to the slaughter and processing facilities, through the retail operations, and all the way to the consumer's table. The decisions and production practices which are made from the farm to the slaughter facility are critical. The final product of this segment of the industry, a live animal delivered to the slaughter facility, is the beginning point for the remainder of the food chain. Avoiding chemical or microbiological contamination of live animals prior to slaughter decreases the risk of food safety problems later in the food production continuum.

Live animal production and transportation in the United States is a complex system with many opportunities for chemical or microbial contamination. Effective risk reduction will require research in this part of the food production continuum to provide the necessary information to construct a food safety framework. Industry sponsored, voluntary quality assurance programs currently address safety issues such as residue avoidance and Salmonella enteritidis reduction and methods to improve quality of product. These can serve as a foundation for more comprehensive pathogen reduction and food safety initiatives.

Food safety and quality assurance programs can be enhanced by a national animal identification program for all livestock. This program will involve working with industry to improve our identification and record keeping system for premises of origin. It is important to be able to follow animals through the marketing channels and other potential food safety control points so that each link of the production chain can be evaluated in case-controlled scientific studies. In addition, commodity quality assurance programs incorporating effective animal identification have the potential of adding value to products.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), through residue programs, has identified which slaughter classes have the greatest risk of unacceptable levels of drug and chemical residues. Pathogen baseline studies on various commodities are being completed to lay a foundation necessary for microbial risk evaluation in meat and poultry. Utilizing efficient traceback technologies will facilitate identification of research gaps for production/marketing/transportation control points. Interagency cooperation and team work among FSIS, Packers and Stockyards, Animal and Health Inspection Service, Food and Drug Administration, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Extension Service, and State agencies and academia can facilitate effective scientific studies with producer groups to find answers to food safety intervention strategies which benefit the industry as well as the public's health.

These are challenging times in the areas of production of animal products for human consumption. However with challenge also comes opportunity. FSIS is looking forward to continuing our cooperative effort with you and other organizations to improve the safety of our nation's food supply.