

## Livestock Identification — The APHIS Perspective

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services (USDA, APHIS, VS) has a long history of being involved with animal identification. We have utilized and supported the use of ear tags, tattoos, bangle tags, back tags, brands, and now electronic implants are coming of age.

Over the years, we have conducted numerous field trials with a variety of ID devices and adhesives in an attempt to accommodate new technology and meet the needs of our programs and those of producers and other Government agencies.

As much as 20 years ago, we were supporting research at Los Alamos for electronic ID.

For those not familiar with APHIS, we monitor the onfarm health of the nation's livestock and prevent the spread of communicable livestock diseases in interstate commerce. Through the use of ID devices, exposed, suspect, or infected animals can be traced back to their premises of origin.

Using the traceback system, premises-of-origin disease status can be determined and intervention strategies implemented. In the terms of quality assurance and in the instance of organisms for which we have many questions to answer, studies to determine such intervention strategies can be completed.

Unfortunately, with animals moving to slaughter, we still depend, to a high degree, on back tags--for which we all recognize their limitations.

So we are really pleased to see you all here, believing as we do that animal identification is a shared responsibility which is of a benefit to all of us.

APHIS supports the efforts of industry in developing a better identification system that will meet the future needs of both regulatory agencies and producers for rapid, accurate livestock identification.

We also believe APHIS is in an excellent position to be an active partner with both industry and other regulatory agencies in developing solutions to animal foodborne disease and residue problems.

So what are we looking for?

In the past, an effective ID has been characterized as having the following attributes:

1. Permanency
2. Inexpensive
3. Ease of application

4. Legible at a few feet
5. Does not damage or cause excessive pain to the animal
6. Tamperproof
7. Individual animal ID
8. Adaptable to coding and modern data retrieval system

Obviously, this is not a perfect list and those attributes can be redetermined at this symposium.

APHIS regulatory requirements for general identification include: all swine in interstate commerce, cattle that are test eligible for brucellosis, livestock in international commerce, and reactor animals.

As we consider the utilization of electronic identification as a means of permanent animal identification, the dairy and sheep industries are in the process of conducting field trials to determine its efficiency. Electronic ID implants have been approved for use in the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program.

Considerations for electronic ID should include standardization, readability, acceptability, application, etc.

In conclusion, we certainly have the tools to be successful. I believe industry is now prepared to be the driving force behind this change; and we, in APHIS, are most certainly anxious to do our part to facilitate changes to enable success.