

## Canadian Progress Towards Establishing a National ID System

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Although it encompasses the exotics as well, the identification issue in Canada focuses primarily on the traditional species of agricultural significance. As in the United States, it seeks to identify animals in a manner that addresses the related needs of all parts of the production and marketing chain. Cost-effectiveness and practicability are its watch words.

An abridged history of coordinated animal identification efforts in Canada could be divided into four parts. Up to and including the 1970s, tradition dominated. Metal tags at seven cents each were the order of the day in both the private and public sectors. Plastics were making significant inroads in some species. The work on electronic identification coming out of Los Alamos stirred considerable interest.

The first half of the 1980s was dominated at the national level by the pursuit of electronic alternatives. The cattle and swine sectors and Agriculture Canada were the principal players. An Electronic ID Committee was formed that in 1984 convened a national meeting of the cattle industry and its service sectors. The United States was one of several countries represented. The Committee established national standards and invited commercial enterprises to submit proposals. The technology of the day, at seventeen dollars per head, was found wanting. The Committee, ever hopeful, has been monitoring progress in the area ever since.

During the second half of the 1980s, Agriculture Canada's leadership role in identifying cattle was markedly reduced. Its National Animal Health Program had identified 15 - 20% of the cattle population annually during the intensive phase of the TB and brucellosis eradication programs. With the introduction of more efficient and effective approaches, the eradication of bovine brucellosis and near eradication of bovine tuberculosis from the national herd, tagging had dropped considerably. In response, the Department initiated legislation that would provide, if ever necessary, the legal mandate for mandatory identification in all species.

At the same time, the Department conducted a series of studies to expand its knowledge base:

A cost benefit analysis examined the viability of electronic identification in the cattle and swine sectors, averaging returns of approximately three to one in the scenarios examined.

A traceback study demonstrated the ever-escalating costs attributable to the multiple herd testing that accompanied investigations of inadequately identified TB suspects.

A survey randomly examined the identification devices present in cattle ears at markets to determine what industry had decided to use for its own purposes. Plastic dangle tags led the way.

One hundred thousand cows entering auctions across Canada were identified with colored tags indicative of their provinces of origin and bearing serial numbers indicative of the sale where they were applied. They were monitored for six weeks at auctions and abattoirs across the country to assess, in part, the value of the approach and to determine flow patterns.

In the province of Saskatchewan, a pilot project sought to determine industry's receptivity to identifying its own beef cattle. The inducement was the provision of free metal tags and taggers through a well-coordinated network of brand inspectors, municipal officers and other provincial and federal agricultural workers. As a measure of the size of the project, it should be noted that it increased the level of identification in the provincial herd by about 3%. The unit cost to the organizers exceeded two dollars per animal identified and the owners' response was only warm.

The 1990s could be entitled the decade of collaboration between industry and government. A National Advisory Board on animal identification was created in 1990. It comprised the cattle and swine sectors, the meat packing industry and the two levels of government involved. In November of 1994, it was absorbed as a subcommittee of the Canadian Animal Health Consultative Committee. The latter group is something of an informal "made in Canada" equivalent of the USAHA.

Several pilot projects have been initiated under the aegis of the collaborative approach:

In 1993, a packing plant in Saskatchewan permitted a pilot video recording of cattle in the killing box. If we envision the identification process as comprising multiple modules, the killing box module of markings recovery figures prominently. The pilot sought to determine what improvements in recovery rates might be achieved through a video approach.

In Alberta, the federal and provincial governments are co-funding with the private sector an electronic identification trial employing 10 - 15,000 beef cattle. In a project which has just begun, the animals will be identified as to herd of origin as they are assembled into commercial feeding lots. Their electronic identification will be used to track growth indices and other significant events throughout their residence. When they are shipped, their identification will be transferred onto corresponding electronic transponders on the packing plant's gambrels, permitting

capture of key production indices for feedback to the feedlot and original owner. Industry is the driving force, seeking information on the benefit cost ratio associated with an electronic approach.

In Quebec, the federal government is co-funding an industry trial to compare electronic identification with a bar coding approach in cow calf, feeder and vealer operations. The 1,500 head trial will be completed in 1995. In this instance, an insurance scheme for beef cattle is the driving force that seeks to reduce fraud and errors by unique individual identification.

Holstein Canada, in collaboration with its service sectors, has spent considerable time investigating enhancements to current registration and identification approaches. In 1995 it will implement the results of its deliberations. Producers will be able to waive photographs and diagrams by applying, in each ear, duplicate plastic tags that bear the registration number and a herd number. The tags, at the

owner's request, could employ bar coding or an electronic inclusion. The associated relational data base is being designed following discussion with stakeholders such as the federal government. The contacts for this and the preceding two initiatives are listed on an accompanying chart.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is committed to the enhancement of animal identification in accordance with ISO standards and the accompanying position paper. In that pursuit, it is receptive to suggestions and will support approaches based on methodology equivalent to its own.