EID Applications in Packing Plants

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Thanks for the opportunity to share with you a little bit from the packers perspective on animal identification. I think most of you in the room are aware that AMI has been a very strong advocate for animal identification whether it be individual animal ID or lot identification. For several years our original objective was primarily from a food safety point of view as it related to illegal drug residues. We had a desire to put in a system where effective tracebacks would provide the necessary accountability for individuals in their drug use practices. Today that emphasis has changed somewhat. Animal identification is increasingly used for animal quality yield evaluation purposes in our plants; the viability of producer packer strategic alliances, partnerships or whatever name you might want to associate with obviously requires the use of effective individual animal identification. Therefore, all my remarks will be relatively brief, but I will characterize those as the two primary areas one from the regulatory perspective for food safety and animal disease control and two, from a herd improvement perspective.

On the food safety side, residue violations continue to be of concern to the meat packers. We are most recently on the verge of embarking on a very uncharted course in terms of pathogen reduction that may end back at the farm level. AMI, as you are likely aware, has advocated the farm to table approach to control emerging pathogens, and some of our emphasis is being directed toward the problems that we face with *E. coli 015787* today. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that, from my perspective, the primary objective of animal ID in this pathogen reduction arena needs to be one of a diagnostic investigational basis. We do not have the ability to control pathogens on the farm in a proven effective long term way, and it is not our desire to create new penalties for farmers -- quarantine or other kinds of things which many have mistakenly said was our objective. If I might draw an analogy to the pathogen reduction versus the residue issue. We can't prevent residues with proper production practices and a variety of other techniques in that arena. We do think the stringent action to prohibit market and slaughter of animals is appropriate. The questionable objective however of a pathogen-free raw meat supply is currently inconsistent with the industry's process capabilities to produce that kind of a product. That is not to say that producers have no responsibility for pathogen reduction . The search to identify on farm prevention systems or other control measures need to proceed at as fast a pace as possible. If such prevention systems are in fact validated, and we would hope that they would be widespread, animal identification will be a necessary component in a system like this.

On the genetic or production improvement side of our business, packers continue to be keenly interested in herd improvement and a cooperative relationship between the supplies of livestock and our facilities. We are interested in long term relationships that provide a consistent available supply of animals for our slaughter facilities. We, however, are not interested in simply providing carcass data to cattle feeders, hog producers or other suppliers to our facilities that could be used as a price negotiating tool in future marketing. We are looking to develop long term relationships for our mutual benefit. The

point that must be made is that, particularly for the cattle industry, carcass quality and yield information must flow back to the cow/calf sector in order for us to make real improvement. It is simply not sufficient enough to begin at the feeder level. Packers are aggressively moving to establish various contractual relationships. I think the animal identification will play an increasing important role in that area. Today most of our products are closely trimmed, they are boneless and carcass yield characteristics become of ever increasing importance in the productivity of our plants.

I think it is important to point out some of the problems and opportunities that face packers. Right at the top , related to animal ID, are food safety concerns. We are extremely concerned about any identification device entering into the food safety problem that may cause public health liability problems or other problems for our members. We also do not want strange material in our rendered by-products. It is impossible to keep that out. Consequently, the removal of any ID device on the slaughter floor needs to be quick and easy, and the device should not pose an unacceptable risk if it does enter into the bone supply. Relating to the food safety concern is the disposal of animal tissue that may contain electronic implants. For instance, landfilling ears, mentioned earlier, creates some environmental concerns for some communities. We need to address the sheer cost of removing and disposing of those types of animal tissues which propose a problem, and we need to consider animal identification devices and how they are used. Third, most of the packers that I have talked to in different areas say that the need for a uniform reading system is a paramount concern. They go as far as to say that if readers must be used in slaughter facilities, the likelihood of packers fully utilizing electronic ID in animals is relatively remote.

Fourth, cost is always a consideration. Any additional cost must be offset by operating efficiency that results from information obtained from these ID devices. It is simply not cost effective to ID just for ID purposes. Another consideration, is that most ID problems rest with cows and bulls, sows and underage animals, because these animals change hands several times during the marketing process. Specifically, we need to pay attention to this class of livestock since they are significant of our food supply. These animals should not be viewed to be sold and slaughtered just for their salvage value.

Last, as Dick Nelson said earlier today, one ID system likely will not work for all species and classes of livestock. They need to be adapted for the particular use; they need to be practical, and they need to be cost effective. Ultimately, in the end, these factors will determine how we proceed in the animal identification arena.