

Livestock Identification Market Implementation Challenges

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I appreciate the opportunity to comment with Albert on what we in the marketing sector foresee as substantial challenges to the implementation of advanced identification procedures. Indeed, we have been active users of ID procedures as a part of our businesses for a long period of time. The marketing sector will certainly be a workhorse of the proposed NAIS. With this broad assumption in mind I would like to focus on several issues that we view as having a major impact on how we conduct our daily operations.

As observers and participants over time monitoring the scattered usage of electronic ID equipment, it becomes quite clear that markets, particularly auction markets, who rely on a consistent flow and movement through the facility, will have predictable interruptions. The very nature of a market, requiring a coordinated teamwork approach to handling livestock at the speed of commerce, would lead us to believe that any glitch in the system and equipment substantially slowing the flow can cause costly disruptions. The challenge of securing reliable electronic equipment to meet our needs in varied environments and provide a high degree of normal operational stability is yet unsolved.

Taking a national ID system from the simple ear tag, brand, tattoo, and other devices to a coordinated computerized electronic function becomes much more complex very quickly. We perceive a challenge in coordinating many of our in place computer systems with the proposed ID system demands. Our market computer systems must be adaptable to EID functions. It is very likely that many market computer systems do not have the capability needed to handle EID procedures. Those markets that currently are operating with inadequate equipment will have a costly challenge in upgrading equipment.

The demands of the EID system to have the proper software allowing for marketing function interface poses a significant problem. The necessity to have the proper interface between the livestock arrival areas, tagging or tag reading, auction ring, out loading, and office accounting is critical for smooth operation. The software demands of the system are highly technical and indeed costly. It is interesting to note that the Australian ID tour group reported that the government there did provide substantial technical assistance in advancing their system.

An additional challenge to the markets is the issue of handling multi species and the inherent ID differences each species presents. Can we devise systems that allow us to be marketing cattle one minute and sheep the next? How much flex will the system allow us in terms of time, needed extra handling of the livestock, and stress to those involved in a species shift during the same operational day?

Given the enormous variation in the ability of livestock owners to officially identify their own livestock, we see a need and challenge for market personnel to assist in the ID device application process. In some cases the absence of safe effective equipment on the farm, to install ID devices especially with the bovine species, leads us to believe that the markets must be allow to assist. This would lead to greater data accuracy and more reliable application of devices. Our challenge, in what we perceive as a need to be a tagging site, is obviously the costly one of retrofitting facilities to provide safe conditions and equipment to get the job done properly.