

Representing State Veterinarians and Animal Health

ID Narrative – 2006 ID Expo, Kansas City
Dr. Sam Holland, South Dakota Animal Industry Board

I'd like to thank the organizers of this event for providing the opportunity to once again experience nearly ALL issues involving animal identification! In interest of time I have written my comments down and will read them.

I was asked if I would provide my views on practical animal ID from my perspective. First – my perspective –

I am State Vet in South Dakota. I've worked as executive director for the South Dakota Animal Industry Board – the independent state agency responsible for administering laws and developing rules for almost all aspects of the industry – from animal health, to markets and dealers, to meat inspection, to non-domestic animals – and a variety of other duties.

Our industry is diversified but we are a strong livestock state with 3.7 million cattle and I frequently point out I come from a state with 5 “cows” for every man, woman, and child. I practiced for 16 years in beef cattle including inspecting a couple of sizeable auction markets and pregnancy testing 30-50,000 cows each fall. As you can see by looking I'm not as young as I was when I first walked into animal ID meetings nearly 20 years ago. This may give you a clue I'm not as technologically competent as those younger nor as those of my age that are involved in ID and in meetings such as this. But I really think I have similar skills and perspective to those who run the ranches, and the markets in our country! So Here Goes:

What is common sense in terms of ID – I'll base my comments on the cattle industry but they probably apply pretty universally:

Let's start by saying what is NOT common sense:

- (1) It is NOT common sense to believe or base ID programs on the thought that affordable technology exists today that enables us to real-time track movement of 100% of animals in captivity.
- (2) It is NOT common sense to believe that the animal industry from conception on – including all involved from producers to processors, to regulators, to sideline fringe groups/commenters will support efforts for such tracking.
- (3) It is NOT common sense to design, develop, or enact a system for ID and tracking for ALL animals for ALL stakeholders ALL AT ONCE.
- (4) It is NOT common sense to DENY that EACH SEGMENT of EACH Animal INDUSTRY will NEED to make changes and that this will involve progress and REVERSALS as the global society evolves. (At a recent meeting with the livestock dealers association as we were discussing ID – a long term dealer and rancher pointed out to me that ranchers in western South Dakota have never opposed PROGRESS – So Long as it didn't mean any CHANGES in the way they did business 😊)

Now – Before I suggest a few things that appear to be common sense ID – Or maybe these include common sense – I'd like to point out a couple of examples of the Immediate Needs for ID in the cattle industry as I experience.

As you may guess – these involve animal health and NOT MARKETING incentives.

1. BSE Sampling – ONLY an EXAMPLE – BUT: Did we learn ANYTHING from the red cow in Alabama with Atypical BSE? BSE surveillance is only one example of ID needs. At a small BSE sampling site in my state – for the short period from January this year till August 1st – 3 weeks ago:
 - a. 1500 brains were sampled from targeted animals
 - b. 858 of these had no official ID if not most of those 858 had NO ID not even a plastic tag!We have a lot of cow feedlots in South Dakota. Many cull dairy cows and most cull beef cows go into a feedlot in the industry today! Our back tag system is a fairly good system but it was designed for the days when cull cattle went from farm or ranch maybe through one market and then to slaughter!

We have one feedlot with 20-25,000 cull cows. Tracing a cow back to a feedlot by a rendering company tag on the hoof will NOT CUT IT! We know we have SIGNIFICANT numbers of Canadian cows in this country and that many of those no longer have ID. These are mixed in with our target surveillance – these cows came in unbranded and no tracking was required! When over HALF the samples we're taking on TARGETED animals to test for BSE are NOT ID'd or TRACEABLE – There is a Need FOR ID.

2. 2nd Example

VS 4-54 Forms – The forms used to report tests at the slaughter plant: Of a recent sampling of 37 animals with titers to brucellosis – 7 had absolutely NO identification – the same scenario would be found for TB sampling! Thank God we've eliminated Brucellosis but what if it works it's way back? Or what are we to do with TB – we recently had a cow with TB at slaughter that we know most likely came from 1 of 3 states – “That don't CUT IT!”

A System Across All Segments?

1. Common Sense Is: Listening to all – even fringe groups and others, BUT: even though they will slow progress and sometimes paralyze efforts on ID, food safety, animal welfare, and a host of other activities, they will NOT provide meaningful direction to the industry.
2. Common Sense Is: ID needs for animal health are NOT necessarily compatible with ID needs for marketing. In fact usually we're looking at two entirely different segments of our industry. Each industry (poultry, dairy, beef, swine) – all have today the breeding segments, the growing, and the finishing segments. This is how we see the industry and this is what will determine the evolution of animal ID. To speak and work in terms of a single ID system for all purposes for all industries is NOT COMMON SENSE and addressing ID needs for animal health separate and apart from the other issues IS common sense.
3. Common Sense Is: In the midst now of various implementation projects, we have learned at great cost that technology, however good it is – is not as good as many had hoped or thought. Reliability, Reportability, Interference, Retention, Data Management, and Cost remain hurdles for the immediate future.
4. Common Sense Is: Existing systems in the poultry, swine, and cattle industries – slowly being abandoned – may very well meet the immediate needs for animal health. Group/lot records on poultry through the NPIP, metal alpha numeric tags such as the little 3 cent bangs tag or silver metal ID tag on cattle.
5. Common Sense Is: In the cattle industry let's immediately ID with a little metal tag all breeding animals at each change of ownership and each interstate movement. It's worked well in the past and is still working where used. In South Dakota we still have mandatory ID on cattle sold for breeding – even with no test requirements for brucellosis or tuberculosis. The little metal tags are read at each change of ownership and entered into a database.

This system is cheap, it's foolproof, it's tested and experienced, the database already exists, and industry groups supported it because it is “COMMON SENSE”?

It seems this system could be expanded and implemented nationwide –

- a. It would be economical.
- b. It would have infrastructure in place.
- c. It would have producer support.
- d. It would be a start of an ID system that would be nationwide, universal, mandatory, and provide excellent tracking for animal health.
- e. It would involve the breeding herd (a segment of the industry that is reasonable to identify.) AS technology advances – we may well find electronic technology is feasible and elect to replace the metal tag with electronic devices – BUT NOT TODAY.

6. Common Sense would say do not spend regulatory time and resources on parallel systems of ID – one for animal health and one for marketing. The steer and heifer segment of the cattle industry, the market swine industry, and the broiler industry will all have ID systems to the extent the market supports. This is excellent – it appears today that less than 10% of the cattle steer and heifer industry sees a need to include premise information. This will grow – but Common Sense says let the market develop it, not the regulatory agencies, not government!
7. Common Sense does say that having a standard premises identification system is needed – both for the breeding herd and the grower/finish segments. So common sense would say let's begin NOW by using premise identification numbers for brucellosis/TB/BQA/FSA/NRCS/Brand inspection programs/ and enable linking them to a single premises ID.

As animals move from these segments then, use brand inspection record systems where they exist and are proven effective to enable tracing when necessary for animal health. All movements requiring brand inspection and/or health certification would have the premises numbers linked to the movements in the records – both in the case of brand inspection records and health certificates. Jim Clement's ideas appear to be an excellent place to start.

Concluding: For Animal Health:

Common Sense ID seems to be:

1. Start with the breeding herd – something we can get our arms around.
2. Start with tags, tools, and database infrastructure we know will work.
3. Keep it a state Animal Health Agency/Industry/USDA program and NOT – as every other program is getting to be – strictly USDA run with total disregard for state animal health agencies and their ability to work with industry.
4. Allow the markets to drive market needed ID.
5. Continue to explore and implement technology as it becomes affordable, workable, and acceptable.