

2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention & Trade Show

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NAIS Update

Experts provide update on voluntary animal identification program.

by Micky Wilson

NASHVILLE, TENN. (Feb. 1, 2007) — In an update about the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), Lynn Heinze, vice president of information services for the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF); Charles Miller, chairman of the U.S. Animal Identification Organization (USAIO); and Bruce Knight, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) undersecretary for marketing and regulatory programs gave a rousing session about the voluntary animal identification (ID) program.

Heinze started the session by calling animal ID a marketing advantage, citing disease traceability, building branded beef programs and increasing quality through the entire production chain as advantages of the system.

He then informed audience members of similar programs and their respective frameworks in other countries, including a mandatory program in Canada, a partially mandatory program in South America, a transport traceability assurance program in Korea, a program for marketing purposes in China, a bookkeeping system in Japan, a voluntary program in Australia and a mandate in Europe.

Heinze suggested retail stores are setting the standards for a traceability system for meat safety. He stressed that a quick-response system is needed, as is a product verification program. Citing the programs in other countries, he closed saying action must be taken in the U.S. because the competition is already doing something.

Miller led into his presentation by stating the objectives of the USAIO:

1. putting an animal movement database in private hands;
2. protecting the core business interest;
3. securing the confidence of producers;
4. minimizing costs across the industry; and
5. making the essential data available to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and state authorities.

USAIO, he said, measures success by complying with an industry-driven, nonprofit data-collection structure and a USDA-approved animal tracking database; by issuing broad commitment for utilization; and by defining a business model minimizing cost and providing for sustainability.

At this point in time, industry-based funding has not been forthcoming and, thus, the USAIO is in an inactive status; however, the database won't be deployed as of yet. The industry, Miller concluded, must decide who will control the animal movement data, and USAIO will move ahead as the industry directs.

Throughout his presentation, Knight stressed the importance of taking the first step in the NAIS — registering your premises. Following premises registration, individual animal ID and traceability can come into play. Producers can choose to participate in any one of these three previously mentioned steps.

"Participation is an individual business decision," Knight reiterated. He assured attendees the voluntary system would keep confidentiality a top priority.

To get the word out to producers and get that ever-important first step taken, Knight told attendees USDA is planning to

"Protect your own herd health. Protect your animals. Protect your livelihood. Protect your future."

— Bruce Knight

cooperate with industry organizations as a source of outreach, though some may argue USDA has done its job already.

Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns made having 25% of premises registered by Jan. 31, 2007, a goal; Knight announced that goal had been met. Some 353,000 premises are currently registered.

The importance behind the push for the NAIS, Knight said, is animal health in the event of a disease breakout. He said he's confident USDA has developed a modern system to enable quick response — within 48 hours to be exact. Closing, Knight said, "Protect your own herd health. Protect your animals. Protect your livelihood. Protect your future."

Heinze, Miller and Knight made their comments Feb. 1 during the Issues Forums sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health during the 2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and NCBA Trade Show. Each forum was repeated three times, allowing cattlemen to attend a session for three of the five topics presented. Audios and summaries of all five sessions will be available in the www.4cattlemen.com newsroom.

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