From The Flock

Canadian Sheep Federation

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Bluetongue On the Move in Europe—Implications for Canadian Sheep Producers

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

On July 10, 2006, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced that it was revising its Bluetongue (BT) import policy, "…based on an updated scientific risk analysis, to eliminate currently bluetongue-related control measures for cattle, sheep and other ruminants imported from the United States". The changes would still allow the CFIA to be able to fulfill its international reporting obligations to trading partners and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

Given the scientific information outlined in the circulated risk assessment, the CSF supported the changes to the import policy. The vector that carries the BT virus exists in western Canada; however, its capacity to transmit BT is very poor due to adverse environmental and climatic conditions for both the vector, making the virus marginally competent. That being said, industry and government did acknowledge that a BT outbreak could still occur in Canada.

The CSF is working closely with the Canadian Cattlemen's Association to develop an indemnity fund. This fund would provide financial assistance to sheep producers who have animals die on-farm in the event of a BT outbreak.

Not long after this announcement was made, BT was discovered in Northern Europe. On August 18, BT was found in Kerkrade, the Netherlands and a few days later, German and Belgian authorities confirmed cases in there territories, near the Dutch border.

In response to this outbreak, a decision was made by the member states' veterinary experts, to define a 150 km surveillance zone, which covered most of the Netherlands and Belgium, all of Luxembourg and part of Germany. In addition, 20 km standstill zones were established around the infected farms. Ruminants and their semen, embryos and ova, produced after May 1, 2006, could not be moved out of the listed areas. Within the surveillance zone, there were certain exemptions for transit and domestic slaughter, subject to strict controls.

By August 31, France had also confirmed a case of BT, within the 150 km restriction zone already established. In response to this case, French authorities established a 20 km protection zone in which a movement ban was applied to all ruminants, other than those that received veterinary approval for transport direct to slaughter or to another holding within the restricted zone.

When the BT outbreak first struck Europe, officials were not certain what serotype (group of microorganisms or viruses) of the disease was infecting the animals. There are 25 known BT serotypes, five of which occur in North America (2, 10, 11, 13 and 17). The serotype that was determined to cause the outbreak in Europe in August was serotype 8.

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This serotype had never been reported in Europe before, which means that the BT outbreak occurring in Europe is considered to be of exotic origin. It is believed that this serotype of BT is of a sub-Saharan lineage.

The precise origin is not yet known, nor is the way in which the virus was introduced into Europe. That being said, authors of an article entitled "Climate change and the recent emergence of Bluetongue in Europe" suggest that the unprecedented spread of the disease further north in Europe "…has been driven by recent changes in the European climate that have allowed increased virus persistence during winter".

With this in mind CSF will continue to negotiate the best possible indemnity fund for the sheep industry and Canadian sheep producers. The fact that BT is moving north in Europe concerns that CSF and we will continue to monitor the issue carefully.

MEAT FLAVOUR "HOLDING UP" EXPORTS

A strong "pastoral" flavour of New Zealand lamb may be holding back export earnings, according to study by the Massey University.

The study by Dr Nicola Schreurs has linked the presence of indole and skatole compounds in white clover grazed by lambs to a distinctive pastoral or "poo" flavour in the meat. According to Schreurs, the low consumption of sheep meat in Asia, especially Japan is partly related to its flavour and odour when cooking and the pastoral flavour may be responsible.

The compounds are formed in the rumen (the first chamber in a sheep's stomach) and are then absorbed from the rumen to be deposited in the meat fat. Schreurs' PhD experiments showed that a greater percentage of the compounds was present in the rumen of sheep consistently fed on clover.

She points out that New Zealand and Australia are the primary countries from which Japan imports its lamb and mutton, but the consumption of both is comparatively low.

She believes the Asian sector of the market for New Zealand sheep-meat is becoming increasingly wealthy and that there is a significant opportunity for the industry to increase export earnings if the troublesome flavours and odours can be minimised.

To do so, sheep should be grazed on "finishing forage" in the period before slaughter, she says. In particular, forages containing condensed tannin have the ability to reduce the formation of indole and skatole in the rumen.

Forages are best sown as a separate crop, as conventional pasture species tend to crowd condensed tannin-containing species in mixed pasture.

The length of grazing time required to remove pastoral flavours is not yet known and is the topic of current research.

Schreurs says pastoral flavour problems have also been associated with beef, and that the grazing concepts in her research apply also to cattle.

"Finishing cattle on grain has been shown to remove pastoral flavours, but grain is impractical as a finishing feed for most New Zealand farmers," she says.

"This is mainly due to the lack of facilities for mass feeding of grains and also because grain is an expensive feed compared to forages."

http://www.ruralnews.co.nz/Default.asp?task=article&subtask=show& item=11232&pageno=1

ON-FARM FOOD SAFETY

Biosecurity: the first step in protecting your flock

By Sarah Turner, Alberta Quality Pork and France Lanthier, Canadian Sheep Federation

In the animal industry, biosecurity has become a comprehensive term that encompasses such things as isolation, use of protective clothing, decontamination and restrictions placed on the movement of personnel and equipment. More generally speaking though, biosecurity refers to the measures used to protect a herd or flock against the introduction or spread of disease.

Disease can be spread by carriers such as vehicles, boots, tools and farm equipment. This is referred to as mechanical transfer. Dogs, cats, rodents, birds, flies and people may be either actively infected carriers and/or mechanical carriers. Most biosecurity programs recommend a single entrance to the main barn that is equipped with a locked door and a doorbell, to protect against risks posed by uninvited visitors. Certain viruses can remain airborne over several kilometers. Not much can be done about that, bust some risks can be eliminated. Flies can usually travel up to one and a half kilometers between farms. Knowing the proximity to neighbors and what protocols they follow may prompt some producers to develop more diligent safeguards. Perimeter fences, signs, weed-free margins around buildings and screening on windows and eaves are some of the things biosecurity experts recommend.

POTENTIAL BIOSECURITY RISKS ON A SHEEP OPERATION

Flock Additions

Introducing new animals into your flock creates a risk for the introduction of disease into your flock. Purchasing animals from a known seller who can provide information or records on the health status of the source flock can reduce the risk of introducing disease into your flock. If you are purchasing animals from an unknown source, placing the new animal in quarantine for a period of at least 30 days can reduce the risk of introducing disease. Developing a new animal processing routine that including practices such as: passage through a medicated footbath, deworming, external parasite treatment, and vaccination. Vaccination will protect the new animal from pathogens on your farm that are potentially foreign to the new animal. Testing for Ovine Progressive Pneumonia and Johne's can reduce the risk of a disastrous flock outbreak. Finally if animals are purchased from a source known to have anthelmintic-resistant worms, these animals should be dewormed prior to arrival and fecal tested to avoid the introduction of resistant parasites into your flock.

Biosecurity continued

Contact with Sheep from Other Operations

Sheep can come into contact with sheep from other operations when they are taken to exhibits for showing, when going to auctions, or when pastured in communal pastures. Preventing nose-to-nose contact with other sheep or contact with manure from other sheep can greatly reduce the risk or disease transmission; vaccination is the best method to protect your flock if they must come in contact with sheep for other operations. The most common contagious diseases encountered and vaccinated against are Clostridia C and D, Tetanus toxoid, and Campylobacter.

Visitors

A farm is an enriching environment for visitors however precautions should be taken to protect your flock from infectious agents that can travel with people. Visitors and barn workers have the potential to carry the parainfluensa virus and the pneumonia-causing bacteria, *Pasteurella multocida*, in their nasal passages. Humans can be mechanical vectors; spreading diseases by failing to wash their hands. Feces from tapeworm-carrying humans contain an infective life stage belonging to this parasite that causes infective cysts to develop in the muscle of animals that ingest them. Requiring that visitors go through a foot bath to clean their footwear, that they change their footwear, or that they put on disposable boot covers are methods to reduce the introduction of disease. Requiring that visitors wear clean clothing or that they change their clothing upon entry into the animal production unit also protects the flock. For added biosecurity, producers can request that visitors disclose if they have been on another sheep operation within a certain time period and deny entry to those who do not meet their requirement. Producers should also require that veterinarians visiting their operation abide by their biosecurity protocols as they are more likely to have been in contact with diseased animals.

Manure Handling

If equipment used to handle manure needs to be used to handle feed there needs be a protocol or standard operating procedure (SOP) followed that describes how to disinfect and thoroughly clean the equipment to avoid contamination. For animals housed on a manure pack, the pack should be monitored and supplied with enough bedding to assure that animals are kept dry.

AUSTRALIAN SHEEP FLOCK SLIDING BACK TOWARDS 100 MILLION

The Australian sheep flock has declined faster than expected, reflecting the dry season in many areas.

The national flock is forecast to fall by about 5 million sheep, dropping back to 100 million by June 2007 and perhaps falling below that.

These figures are given in Meat and Livestock's sheep situation update, released today.

Mutton production is forecast to remain below its 2006 level over the next four years, as producers begin a slow flock rebuild.

"But with sheep availability now expected to decline in the short term and demand to remain firm in the Middle East, Africa and North America, sheep prices could recover some ground over the coming year," MLA chief forecaster, Peter Weeks, says.

Saudi Arabia is expected to take 1.2 million live Australian sheep and lambs in 2006 and 1.4 million in 2007.

This follows the impressive re-start of the live export trade in mid 2005.

Despite the Saudi return to the export market, the tight availability of Australian sheep will keep live sheep exports around the 2005 level of 4.2 million during 2006 and over the medium term.

SOURCE: http://www.farmonline.com.au/news_daily.asp?ag_id=37048

Biosecurity con't

Other Animals/Other Species

Access to stored feed and bedding by rodents, cats, dogs, and wildlife is a source of various sheep diseases. Rodents can actively shed micro-organisms such as Salmonellosis and Collibacillosis, while Starlings have been identified as carriers of TGE and others contagious diseases. Cats are the most used method of rodent control great care must be taken to avoid Toxoplasmosis infection. Toxoplasmosis is caused by a single-celled parasite called Toxoplasma gondii which is found predominantly in the feces of young cats. While alternative rodent control methods such as traps or poisons can be used, if cats are utilized it is recommended that a mature-spay or -neutered population be utilized. Prompt disposal of deadstock and placentas will discourage wildlife from visiting the sheep operation and potentially reducer predation as well.

Shearing

When shears are not disinfected between sheep infections such as caseous lymphadenitis can both be introduced (by a hired shearer) and spread within your flock. It is recommended that shears be disinfected between each sheep. If this is not possible, one method of reducing the risk of spreading disease is to shear from the youngest to the oldest sheep.

Vehicles

Access to vehicles should be limited in the production area. Vehicles utilized to transport animals, feed, and bedding should be thoroughly disinfected if they have been utilized on another animal production site or if they have come in contact with contaminants.

We've all heard the saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Indeed in many cases a little precaution will avoid one having to deal with a lengthy and sometimes costly crisis down the road.

Manitoba Rancher Losing Sleep over Stolen Sheep

Norman Goulet is losing sleep, but counting sheep is not the solution — it has been the problem.

Goulet, a rancher from St. Claude, south of Portage la Prairie, Man., has had his sheep rustled three times in the past three years. The latest heist took place earlier this month.

That was when someone loaded 650 sheep from one of Goulet's pastures into stock trailers and spirited them away. Since then, Goulet said, he has been sleeping in a camper in his pasture. RCMP investigators are now looking into the sheep heist.

"There's kind of a market in Manitoba for lamb that people kill on their own farms and they supply to people in or around Winnipeg," Goulet said Thursday. He added RCMP investigators told him figures from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency suggest a large number of lambs are not accounted for during inspections.

"Some people say up to 10,000 lambs in Manitoba ... are unaccounted for every year," he said. "They're just killed and slaughtered, uninspected." Goulet estimated he has lost a total of 1,900 sheep over the last three years.

Goulet said insurance does cover part of the loss, but he figures he's still out $75,000 to $90,000.

RCMP in Treherne investigating the case told CBC News Thursday that they have no clues yet as to where the sheep went. At this time, they are preparing a Crimestoppers report in the hopes of finding someone who may have information on the case.

Source: www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2006/08/24/stolen-sheep.html

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR SHEEP HAS BEEN STOLEN???

WHAT SHOULD A PRODUCER DO?

Immediately notify the RCMP (local police), your local CFIA office, your local provincial sheep associations and your insurance company. Give description of sheep, tag numbers if possible and number missing. Provide the provincial sheep organizations with the name of the police officer they spoke to. Also call the CSF at 1-888-684-7739

WHAT SHOULD THE POLICE DO?

Contact provincial sheep associations and provide a contact person for further liaison .

WHAT SHOULD THE CANADIAN SHEEP FEDERATION DO?

Contacts all provincial sheep associations, provincial agricultural ministries, puts out a news release regarding the missing sheep using the information provided by the producer.

WHAT SHOULD THE PROVINCIAL SHEEP ASSOCATION DO?

Notify the salesbarns and advise police about what salesbarns have sales in the immediate future.

Success Depends On Excellent Management and Leadership

From The Grower September 2006

I recently finished reading a book entitled 'The Kerry Way' by James J. Kennelly. It chronicles the history of an Irish corporation, begun in the early 1970s as a dairy cooperative with a share capital of nine pounds. By 2000, the co-operative had a market capitalization that exceeded two billion pounds. Largely controlled to this day by the original co-op stakeholders, it is a must read for anyone interested in why some cooperatives fail miserably while others appear to know no bounds, succeeding beyond many peoples' wildest dreams.

The lessons are as applicable to horticulture as dairy. In fact more so given the differing industry structure and legislation that exists in Canada compared to Ireland. Lessons given also illustrate that while you cannot legislate to guarantee success, you can certainly legislate in ways that weaken the most ardent commercial operation to years of, at best, a mediocre level of performance!!

Part of my desire to read 'The Kerry Way' stemmed from my recent international travels interviewing successful agri-food value chain partnerships, including horticultural alliances, that had encouraged a co-operative approach amongst producers in order to create the critical mass necessary to supply target markets. I also wanted to understand whether the conclusions of others matched my own thoughts about what makes a successful value chain and/or co-operative. To my mind, that similar factors impacted the success of the two approaches already seemed likely. Not least because, like a co-operative, the success of a value chain partnership relies to a great extent on co-operation between the involved parties and adherence to an economically sustainable business model.

On reflection, after reading 'The Kerry Way', I am even more convinced that the factors that make for a successful value chain are almost identical to those for a successful co-operative. The Kerry Group has feet in both camps. Yes, they are first and foremost a co-operative. However they have used the co-operative's strength and capabilities to strategically embed themselves in the value chains to which they belong. This has resulted in the development of close, mutually beneficial relationships with participants situated along the entire chain. They are clearly aware that their success relies upon the success, and strength, of the entire chain.

A significant reason for the Kerry Group's success is, therefore, that its operations and management style encompassed the very practices that enable both a co-operative and a value chain partnership to prosper. These include an unswerving and passionate desire to supply according to market demands with precision; a leadership style that is able to corral the complementary strengths of a team; a seeming urgency and vision for adapting to industry trends while they have the ability to do so with the maximum resources. They identify trends and move to take advantage of opportunities out of choice and ambition, not a panicked sense of survival.

Like other successful and innovative agri-food businesses, not waiting until forced to react with insufficient resources to mount a good fight places them in a strong strategic position. Kerry members also continually invested in the business in order to ensure continued commercial strength. All too often the contrary occurs: The financial life-blood is sucked out of agricultural initiatives by a membership that lives for the 'now' and has little sense of strategic necessity.

Success Continued

The businesses and the managers that I met during my recent travels also chose their partners carefully and took a strategic approach to business. While emotions are a part of business, they should not get in the way of making sound commercial decisions. Those that wanted to stick around were welcomed into the fold and treated with respect and appreciation. Those that were not committed were either let go – or pushed. There is no room in successful businesses for half-hearted or theological approaches that do not suit market requirements.

Co-operation is a necessary part of business in agriculture. It is however dangerous to approach co-operation as a theological principle that defies economic logic. Quoting a now-passed gentleman I would dearly love to have met, Eddie Hayes, who was a long-term advocate of the original Kerry Co-operative and an ardent believer in the need for co-operatives in agriculture: "We may be a co-op but we run a business."

So, whether it is Kerry or any other agri-food business, how does all this come about? The main criteria are the existence of strong, effective and wise leaders at critical levels of the business. A leader can make or destroy a team. All of the successful agri-food businesses that I have ever met also have one strong, capable and decisive overall leader that understands the company's commercial needs and can empower people to act as a team in order to fulfill those needs.

The most effective leaders are those with a vision for the future that they passionately believe could be achieved in a realistic timeframe, and an ability to identify what capability gaps need to be filled in order to achieve that vision.

Value chain partnerships and co-operatives are tools that producers can use to great affect, particularly in the hands of strong dynamic leaders and effective management teams. Both require adherence to proven economic logic and the ability to develop proven commercial strengths, thus enabling the achievement of a strategic intent focused on meeting market demands.

JOHANNS REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO VOLUNTARY ANIMAL ID

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns avoided use of the M-word ("mandatory") in a keynote address on animal identification at the ID/INFO EXPO 2006 last week in Kansas City , Mo.

"I believe the best system will be driven at the ground level," Johanns told the audience of animal industry producers, regulators and tech providers. "I believe the best approach is a voluntary one driven by the private sector."

The agriculture secretary was repeatedly pressed on the mandatory/voluntary issue. One questioner cited a poll of conference attendees showing 72% doubting that full implementation of the National Animal Identification System would take place by 2009.

Johanns replied that a timeline issued by USDA in April set benchmarks. "This is what we'd like to see accomplished," he said. "If they're missed by a month or two, it's no big deal. If you can measure success, you're more likely to work hard to achieve it."

Johanns acknowledged that some states are far along toward implementing premises registration for NAIS, while others are lagging behind. "We will do all we can to boost that effort," he said.

Asked how a voluntary system could provide needed information in the event of an animal disease outbreak, Johanns said, "Let's say two years from now 30% of the dairy herd is registered. Obviously, you've got a gap. We can go to that 30%, and they can trace the disease. Or they can't, because there's no tag. That's why we need to move this forward to getting all the animals registered in the system.

U.S. PLANS TOUGHER INSPECTIONS AT BORDER

Airline passengers, shipping agents on hook to finance increased agricultural checks

Calling Canada a potential conduit for bioterrorism, pests and disease, the U.S. government is boosting its northern border inspection muscle -- and making Canadian air travellers and commercial shippers foot the bill.
In what it calls an "emergency action," the United States Department of Agriculture has served notice it will levy a per-trip surcharge on all air travellers and commercial cargo shippers from Canada, starting Nov. 24.
The U.S. entry fee will range from $5 (U.S.) per air passenger to $488 per maritime vessel, with trucks paying $5.25 per crossing and railways $7.50 per car.

The estimated $77-million raised annually will fund a much-expanded agriculture inspector program to screen air travellers and commercial rail, truck, water and plane shipments for pests and biohazards.

Air travellers can expect ticket prices to rise to reflect the passenger levy plus a percentage of a $70.25-per-plane inspection charge. Visitors to the United States should expect tougher scrutiny from inspectors looking for prohibited birds, animals, fruit and vegetables.

"The U.S./Canada border . . . is the longest undefended border in the world," the U.S. Department of Agriculture said in a late-August announcement in the official Federal Register. "Our current dearth of inspection activity at that border could potentially leave the United States vulnerable to bioterrorism."

Canadian airlines warned yesterday that the new surcharge will discourage U.S.-bound air travel, and business groups said they're worried the unexpected move could mean more border traffic snarls that undermine two-way commerce.

International Trade Minister David Emerson said yesterday that Washington alerted him to the measure about two weeks ago, adding he plans to keep talking with the United States to forestall any impact on cross-border business. "There's no doubt that would be a concern and we intend to work with the United States to ensure that does not happen," he said in an interview. "Anything that is trade disruptive is a major concern for me."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says records show Canada is an increasing threat when it comes to unwanted plant pests entering the United States, particularly from third-country products relabelled as Canadian and then exported in U.S-bound shipments.

"Interceptions at the border, including one in Detroit in 2004 of Spanish oranges and Dutch peppers, manifested as products of Canada, provide evidence of this practice," the department said. Findings "strongly indicate we need to expand and strengthen our pest exclusion and smuggling interdiction efforts at the border."

Unlike other countries, Canada has until now enjoyed an exemption from U.S. border inspections of domestically grown fruit and vegetables as well as the user fees assessed to pay for the checks.
Trade lawyer Larry Herman said the planned changes appear to breach the North American free-trade agreement. "Border inspections for health, safety and other reasons can be one of the most aggressive uses of protectionism," said Mr. Herman of Cassels Brock in Toronto.

AUSTRALIA LOSING THOUSANDS OF AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES

New figures show Australia has lost more than 16,000 agricultural businesses, including farms, in the last five years. A report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows the number of grain, dairy and sheep farms has dropped significantly. President of the South Australian Farmers Federation Wayne Cornish says poor commodity prices and climate change are largely to blame. "Climate change, whatever that means, whether it's just cyclical or whether it's here for ever, is occurring and that's putting some operations under enormous pressure," he said. "And sometimes the smart thing to do is to exit with a large amount of equity and transfer your life somewhere else."

Source: http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200608/s1726575.htm

NAIS: ID Working Group Makes Initial Recommendations

Working groups representing each species of animal targeted for inclusion in the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) last week offered initial recommendations for the plan.

USDA continues to work with members of different segments of the livestock industry and producer groups to lay the groundwork for NAIS and is encouraging producer feedback. "It's not all one industry. The challenges (to ID and trace movements) with each species is different," said John Wiemers, a member of USDA's NAIS staff. He also serves as chairman of the federal Interagency Coordinating Committee on Animal ID. "It's a work in progress and we invite input."

Species in the plan include cattle, swine, goats, sheep, bison, horses, poultry, llamas, elk, and reindeer. The target date is January 2009 for full implementation of NAIS. Common themes among some of the working groups include recommendations for USDA to offset the cost of the system to relieve the burden of producers, data to be stored privately to remain protected from Freedom of Information Act requests, and for universal technology such as radio frequency ID tags and universal readers to be used so all components of the system are compatible.

Initial recommendations were reported last week during the ID Info Expo hosted in Kansas City by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture. Gary Wilson, Ohio cattle producer and co-chairman of the cattle working group, said his group recommends:

• Reporting of cattle movements be the responsibility of the receiving party.
• No requirement that animals destined for custom slaughter for personal use be identified.
• That producers be encouraged but not required to identify calves as early as possible, and
• That dead animals be reported so the ID number can be deleted from the database.

Meanwhile, the swine working group recommended hogs be identified in groups or lots, animals that move outside the production system be identified, and that there be no requirement for daily recording of animal movements for a 48-hour traceback, according to Patrick Webb, director of swine health programs for the National Pork Board.

Similarly, the equine working group is not in favor of recording every animal movement and instead would rely on current regulatory mechanisms in place to record horse movements, with the exception of a one-time ID.

"Our first approach was to be consistent with other (species) recommendations" and track each movement, said Amy Mann, co-chairman of the equine species working group. "But from a practical standpoint, it's not pos-

Border Inspections con't

The USDA proposes to tax all air passengers from Canada to the United States because it says border inspection data indicate they "represent another pest pathway."

Fred Gaspar, a spokesman for the Air Transport Association of Canada, which represents air carriers, called the passenger levy "another nail in the coffin" for plane travel that would discourage discretionary travel.

He said it's unfair that planes and passengers will be assessed the same fee regardless of whether they're carrying items worth screening.

U.S. officials said they expect increased scrutiny of cargo that's described as Canadian-grown fruits and vegetables and said the number of land-border-crossing agriculture inspectors would jump by nearly 40 per cent to 175 people. An agriculture official projected that airport-based inspectors would rise to 65 -- 25 per cent more than in 2003. The Canadian Trucking Alliance said it is worried about the impact of more inspections.

"The hope is the USDA will recognize they cannot start to create bottlenecks at the border," said Graham Cooper, senior vice-president of the trucking group. Shirley-Ann George of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce called the levy and increased inspections one more inhibitor to cross-border trade and a duplication of existing prohibitions against smuggling. "At some point, there is a straw that breaks the camel's back," she said.

Cost and Confidentiality Among Key NAIS Concerns

Members of the working groups who are drawing up recommendations for the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) are clear on two key points:

In order for the system to function properly and be cost effective, the federal government should help offset the cost, and livestock producers must be ensured confidentiality.

Those issues were raised last week at the ID Info Expo hosted by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) in Kansas City.

"Cost is probably going to raise the most opposition to any type of system," said Scott Stuart, chairman of the NIAA board. USDA currently is covering the cost of premises registration, which is free to producers, and is reviewing different animal tagging and data collection technology for possible use in NAIS.

However, with no one-size-fits-all formula possible to identify all the different animal species and with many technical components of NAIS still under consideration, the cost seems to be a moving target. "So far we (at USDA) have built and paid for the premises registration system and for public outreach," said John Wiemers, a member of USDA's National Animal Identification staff.

"Down the road, I'm not sure how the federal government will be involved in buying the infrastructure."

Gary Wilson, an Ohio cattle producer and co-chairman of the cattle working group, and Patrick Webb, director of swine health programs for the National Pork Board, both emphasized their working groups believe the federal government should cover the cost.

"Producers will not bear the full cost of establishing or maintaining NAIS," Wilson said of his group's recommendation.

Webb expressed similar sentiments. "We feel this system should be publicly funded and not an added (farm) cost."

NAIS Recommendations con't

The goat and sheep working groups each recommended enhancing the current scrapie eradication program, although tag retention is a concern, according to Linda Campbell, chairman of the goat working group.

Campbell's group also recommended more time to define high-risk and low-risk events to determine when a movement needs to be reported.

Cindy Wolf, representing the sheep working group, requested a cost-benefit analysis to determine if a $2.50 tag on a $15 animal is economically feasible.

USDA's Wiemers said poultry ID appears to be a "real challenge." The poultry working group is examining a variety of different devices such as group ID, leg bands, and wing bands.

ID recommendations for elk and bison are similar to those for cattle except the bison working group recommended the selling party report movements rather than the buyer.

Cost and Confidentiality Among Key NAIS Concerns continued...

Along with cost assistance, maintaining producer confidentiality will be vital to the system's success, Wilson said.

"If we don't get confidentiality, we shouldn't do this," he said.

A private database should be more secure from Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests than one maintained by USDA, according to Stuart. However, the data collection component of NAIS is not complete.

"It's a big question," Stuart said. "I think it still needs to be answered."
Wiemers downplayed the situation somewhat. "The "nature of the data is not that economically sensitive. We may even be overstating the risk," he said.

Producer information for premises ID is similar to that listed in the white pages of a phone book (name, farm name, address), according to Wiemers.

In the event of need for a trace-back if there is an animal disease outbreak, he said the only information USDA will be able to access is the date, premises number, animal ID number, and the event.

"It's very simple information," he said. "We're not asking for the price paid, carcass grade, the animal's weight, or any information like that."

The cattle working group took the confidentiality measure a step further and recommended all information pertaining to NAIS be FOIA-exempt.

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