

North Dakota Verified Livestock; a marketing tool for beef exports

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Introduction

On August 31, 2010, North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring announced a new livestock marketing program, North Dakota Verified Livestock, designed to assist North Dakota cattle producers in complying with export regulations through age and source verification. As foreign markets are increasingly important to the beef industry, accountability practices become the responsibility of all live-cattle production including producers, backgrounding facilities and feedyard managers. North Dakota is pursuing relations with foreign investors that ensure high quality and safe beef products through third-party verification.

Background

Two laws in the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) address the need for a state age- and source-verification program. NDCC §4-01-22, passed in 2005, allows the agriculture commissioner to “develop a source-verified and process-verified beef marketing program known as the certified beef program.” Passed in 2009, NDCC § 36-01-33 gives the State Board of Animal Health authority to provide inspection and verification services for the purpose of certifying that livestock have been or are being raised according to standards and protocols by the articulated producers/processors.

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) considered establishing the state’s own independent, federally-approved program, but eventually decided to partner with an already-established and proven program, AgInfoLink of Westminster, CO.

Eligibility

North Dakota producers or those who have land contiguous to North Dakota qualify for the North Dakota Verified Livestock program. To verify livestock, a producer must become a verified product supplier and have record of the training, a profile, and documented procedures to verify livestock on file. For cattle to be verified throughout the production line, it is essential that all sectors – cattle producers, backgrounding facilities and feedyards – are approved product suppliers.

Verification for Cow/Calf Producer

Cow/calf producers interested in participating in the program must schedule an on-site training session. A representative from the program will train producers and document their ability to participate in the program through the AgInfoLink Quality Management System.

Producers must have the ability to tag cattle with the program-compliant tag prior to leaving the ranch of origin. The North Dakota Verified Livestock program uses an International Organization of Standardization (ISO)-compliant electronic identification (EID) tag manufactured by AllFlex, Inc. that is specific to the program.

Verified product suppliers are responsible for uploading required information into the AgInfoLink Private Data Sharing Network (PDSN). This information includes individual or group birth dates, unique individual identification, EID tag numbers, procedures to identify the operation, average calving period and recordkeeping procedures.

Producers must keep accurate records to support verification claims for three years. It is the responsibility of the producers to maintain the integrity of the program, and failure to provide correct information can ultimately result in the termination of their participation in the program. Certificates will be generated to support the verified claims.

Verification for Backgrounding Operation/Feedyards

Requirements for backgrounding yard and feedyard facilities are similar to those for producers. Backgrounding and feedyard managers are required to participate in the quality management system training, complete an operation profile and document procedures.

Due to the assumed risk the manager takes with conforming and non-conforming product, operation procedures must be followed for every group of cattle they manage as age and source verified. It is the manager's responsibility to contact the scheduled packing plant to understand requirements and proper shipping documentation before the cattle leave the feedyard.

The North Dakota Verified Livestock Program has the ability and the flexibility to accept age- and source-verified cattle from other USDA-approved verified programs, allowing feedyards to purchase cattle from multiple sources.

Premiums

A number of outside influences such as genetics, vaccination programs, and marketing claims can add value to cattle. Although there is not a specific premium that verified product suppliers can expect, participating in an age- and source-verification program allows cattle to be sold to alternative markets; both foreign and domestic.

Future Developments

The future of the North Dakota Verified Livestock program has many opportunities. NDDA is currently working with multiple retailer/wholesalers as suppliers of the program-compliant tag. Verified producers will be able to purchase the tags where they purchase other livestock supplies. Also, NDDA is exploring opportunities in which age- and source-verified livestock can be better marketed to auction markets, cattle buyers, and the feedyards through technology and communication efforts.

Summary

The North Dakota Verified Livestock program provides age- and source-verification services through AgInfoLink's USDA-approved process verified program. Utilizing AgInfoLink allows North Dakota producers the opportunity and flexibility to participate in a wide variety of premium marketing channels while benefiting from producer-driven customer service with a program focused only on providing flexible, convenient, and cost-effective verification services.

As relationships with foreign markets continue to develop, age and source verification is a priority. North Dakota Verified Livestock is a unique and flexible program for livestock producers. Using the management practices already established by producers in the state, the phrase "Made in North Dakota" is value to the consumer.

