

Verification - Same Story, Different Time

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Seldom is it worth the effort to repeat information quickly, but the National Animal Identification System continues to be portrayed in marketing circles as simple. However, few producers are ready to fully understand or appreciate what it is they are being asked to do. There are questions that need to be answered.

At present, there is no mandatory animal identification program in the U.S. There also is no indication a program will be put in place in the near future. Instead, the focus appears to center on assisting a multitude of private efforts. Maximum utilization of these efforts provides the sophistication to furnish 48-hour traceback, if an event occurs that would require such an effort.

The animal health side of the system requires very little data and, if all goes well, will never be retrieved. So why the big rush for animal identification?

The phenomenon of “premiums” is abounding. The utilization of age- and source-verification seems to be the impetus for the current hype. Everyone wants a premium, but no one ever knows if they got one. The calculation of such an event requires a very fixed and identifiable benchmark from which to gauge the base value versus the actual received value. In the world of marketing cattle, numerous uncontrolled variables cause comparative premium calculations to be very difficult to calculate.

The current hype is a lot like the old Green Tag efforts that documented herd health practices. The management and health protocols seemed to be so overwhelmingly appreciated.

Everyone claimed Green Tag status and the market seemed to let the blind lead the blind. However, no one was blind. In the end, reputation and honesty held the upper hand, but premiums were lost somewhere in the transaction.

The world moves in cycles. We seem to have entered the age and source verification cycle along with the resurgence of the word premium. The difference is the world is a more connected place today and account-

ability in any program has dramatically increased in the past decade. So when someone says your calves are age- and source-verified, think before you jump.

The USDA Web site (<http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>) provides producers with the questions they need to ask. For instance, one question asks if animals can be identified as a group.

The USDA says the answer is yes. “An animal production system can use group/lot identification if the animal owner is able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of state animal health officials that, through group identification and production records, 1) traceback to all premises that have had direct contact with a suspect animal can occur within 48 hours, and 2) the potential for commingling does not exist. Each group will be identified with a unique and standardized number. Verifiable records will be required to further document premises identification and dates of movement.”

Interesting answer and more producers need to read the answer before committing to one of the many programs that are being offered. Producers also need to realize that the question pertains to animal health, not age and source verification.

Do the requirements for animal health reflect the requirements for age and source? These are two completely different concepts. What does the potential for commingling mean? What does “verifiable records” mean? Is the calendar date good? Is it verifiable? Will your farm or ranch processes stand up to the eventual accountability and intensive review for nonverifiable statements made during the sale of calves?

Good questions. Think before you speak.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1041 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0315.

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