

Cattlemen Still Concerned with Mandatory ID

Today the USDA announced that it issued its final rule for the Animal Disease Traceability Program.

"With the final rule announced today, the United States now has a flexible, effective animal disease traceability system for livestock moving interstate, without undue burdens for ranchers and U.S. livestock businesses. The final rule meets the diverse needs of the countryside where states and tribes can develop systems for tracking animals that work best for them and their producers, while addressing any gaps in our overall disease response efforts. Over the past several years, USDA has listened carefully to America's farmers and ranchers, working collaboratively to establish a system of tools and safeguards that will help us target when and where animal diseases occur, and help us respond quickly," stated USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

In the press release USDA stated, "Under the final rule, unless specifically exempted, livestock moved interstate would have to be officially identified and accompanied by an interstate certificate of veterinary inspection or other documentation, such as owner-shipper statements or brand certificates. These include accepting the use of brands, tattoos and brand registration as official identification when accepted by the shipping and receiving States or Tribes, permanently maintaining the use of backtags as an alternative to official ear tags for cattle and bison moved directly to slaughter, accepting movement documentation other than an Interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (ICVI) for all ages and classes of cattle when accepted by the shipping and receiving States or Tribes, clarifying that all livestock moved interstate to a custom slaughter facility are exempt from the regulations, and exempting chicks moved interstate from a hatchery from the official identification requirements."

"Beef cattle under 18 months of age, unless they are moved interstate for shows, exhibitions, rodeos, or recreational events, are exempt from the official identification requirement in this rule. These specific traceability requirements for this group will be addressed in separate rulemaking, allowing APHIS to work closely with industry to ensure the effective implementation of the identification requirements."

All ages and classes of dairy cattle are included in this rule.

Kansas Cattlemen's Association (KCA) contends that this rule is still flawed and has little to no benefit for consumers.

"USDA is putting the burden on producers, but once the animals go to slaughter, this program has no relevance so if there is a food safety issue, this program does nothing for consumer confidence or food safety. Also, USDA puts implementation on individual states, but through the working group that KCA has been involved with, states are going to vary in their implementation; not all states are going to see eye to eye, and some states do not know how they are going to implement this and if that implementation will work. KCA is pleased that USDA did add brands as a possible identification, but non-official identification, approved by USDA, including brands will only be relevant if both the shipping and the receiving state accept that identification. There are many non-mandatory brand states across the country, including Kansas. USDA makes this program mandatory for animals crossing state lines, but shipping location for animals sold through the livestock markets will not be determined until after the sale of those cattle. This will require extra work and additional stress on the animals. Another issue is that USDA is only providing a book end solution to tracking these animals. There isn't a realistic tracking system in place to effectively track a diseased animal. USDA says that it is not going to over burden producers, but this program does. It puts the entire burden on producers. The extra costs will be placed on producers. The losses will be placed on producers. And yet, when it comes to true disease prevention, steps to protect the health of the U.S. cattle herd have not been taken; but instead, policies and regulations have been eased to allow food and animals from countries with catastrophic foreign animal diseases to enter the U.S. with little supervision and oversight," according to KCA.

This rule is scheduled to be published on December 28, 2012 and take effect February 26, 2013. No official date for enforcement has been determined. There will be additional rulemaking in reference to feeder cattle and beef cattle under 18 months, but there is no specific time when that will be completed nor are there benchmarks within this rule to indicate when any future rulemaking process will begin. On a conference call with Deputy Administrator and Chief Veterinary Officer for APHIS' Veterinary Services' (VS) program Dr. John Clifford, he did indicate that USDA would like to work collaboratively with states and industry stake holders to determine how to measure the responsiveness of animal disease tracking without extra burden and costs to the industry.

KCA supports animal health and disease prevention and will continue to be involved with other stakeholders at the state and national level to address this program and animal health and animal disease prevention. KCA does support identifying cattle through visual tags and brands, but through a voluntary producer initiative rather than a federal mandatory animal ID system. KCA will continue to urge the USDA and Congress to support and work towards maintaining a healthy U.S. cattle herd which includes distinguishing U.S. cattle from other North American cattle like those coming from Canada and Mexico.

