October 5, 2020

United States Department of Agriculture
Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8,
4700 River Road Unit 118
Riverdale, MD 20737-1238

RE: *Docket No. APHIS-2020-0022 Use of Radio Frequency Identification Tags as Official Identification in Cattle and Bison*

On behalf of the United States Cattlemen's Association (USCA) and our nationwide membership of cow-calf producers, backgrounders, feedlot operators, livestock haulers, and independent processors, we thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the use of radio frequency identification (RFID) tags as official identification in cattle and bison.

OFFICIAL IDENTIFCATION IS DISEASE TRACEABILITY

At its 2019 Annual Meeting, USCA members approved policy related to Animal Health and ID Priorities. Within that policy included the following statement:

"*There is concern across the countryside that a move toward electronic identification will open the door for private tag and data companies, and other allied industries, to profit from the effort, leaving the producers' information in the hands of a third-party provider…the main reason for official identification is for disease traceability, and it is with the above concerns in mind that USCA suggests that any official USDA identification remain focused on disease traceability."*

We will return to this purpose throughout these comments as the foundation of a successful national identification program.

Diseases like the African Swine Fever, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, and Foot and Mouth Disease pose a significant risk to the health of the domestic livestock herd and, consequently, threatens the nation's food supply and economic well-being. As stated in *Docket No. APHIS-2020-0022,* knowing where diseased and at-risk exposed animals are, as well as where they have been and when, is indispensable to emergency response and ongoing disease control and eradication programs.

DATA IS STRICTLY FOR TRACEABILITY PURPOSES

All official tag information should be held in state animal health databases and shared with federal animal health officials as needed. Producer information should only be used for disease tracking by state and federal animal health officials and for no other purposes.

There should be absolutely no private control of data, or access to the data, without the prior approval of the owner at the time of application. The confidential nature of the information stored within an ADT system would present a clear conflict of interest for private organizations to own and manage.

COST OF TAGS

USCA commends the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for currently providing RFID tags free of charge to states and accredited veterinarians. However, more certainty is needed that producers will not be held responsible for future costs related to the physical tag, tag application, data collection, and data management.

This is especially important for our young and beginning producers who are just starting out and may not have the capital or labor for costs related to tag application. Additionally, as producers have weathered both industry-shattering market events and a pandemic within the last year alone, a new cost imposed by the federal government would not be feasible for our members at this time.

USCA also requests that USDA provide financial assistance for livestock markets to acquire equipment that is able to read both low frequency (LF) and ultra-high frequency (UHF) tags.

IDENTIFICATION MUST MOVE AT SPEED OF COMMERCE

USCA believes that the industry will need to embrace UHF tags to improve read range and the ability to read animals and groups at the speed of commerce.

In 2014, USDA recognized the benefits of ultra-high frequency (UHF) technology over low-frequency technology for meeting the goals of Animal Disease Traceability (ADT) while also supporting the ability of the livestock industry to move at the speed of commerce.

In 2016, USDA developed and issued a world leading interim programming standard for UHF tags used for livestock with cooperation of tag manufacturers. This USDA standard is built on the already existing ISO (International Standards Organization) 18000-6C standard governing the use of UHF technology in all industries. The "*Interim Tag Data Standard for UHF Animal Identification*" dated August 2016[1] is now the basis for developing an additional ISO standard for a common encoding scheme to be used exclusively for livestock in addition to the existing ISO standard.

In December 2017, the Kansas Livestock Association voted unanimously to develop an industry-based traceability system within Kansas called the Kansas CattleTrace system. An estimated 15 million bovine movements occur within Kansas each year. A key tenant of their vote was to only use UHF in the roll out of the program, as “we have tried LF and it did not work”.

In 2020, the Kansas system was renamed the U.S CattleTrace system largely due to the subsequent connectivity with other states using UHF systems at auctions and livestock sorting facilities whose livestock were ending up in Kansas feed yards and packing plants.

As demonstrated above, UHF is the technology of choice for cattle producers due to its ability to maintain the current speed of commerce. A properly set up UHF tag reader is able to identify all

[1] United States Cattlemen’s Association, “Interim Tag Data Standard for UHF Animal Identification”, August 2016, https://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/uhf-interim-tag-data-standard.pdf

animals in a typical sale ring or ally within a few seconds, while a properly set up LF tag reader can read single file animals or animals stopped in a chute via special and slow handling procedures.

USCA is optimistic that USDA will support UHF tags in the same manner that they are supporting LF tag distribution and use. The Department must remain technology neutral as they begin to transition to RFID identification devices. Both UHF and LF technology should be included in any national program, giving U.S. cattle producers the opportunity to choose which system is best for their operation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Official identification should only be required on breeding cattle and only as they move into interstate commerce, or as determined by each state's importation requirements.

- 840 series tags should only be used as official electronic identification on cattle that are born and raised within the U.S. (*900 series tags are not unique in their official identification*).

- Premises identification numbers (PINs) should not be required to acquire and apply EID tags. The same information can be gathered on health certificates and test charts and other animal health documents.

- The use of USDA metal NEUS tags and electronic tags should be allowed to continue simultaneously within this transition. The industry requires more time to adapt and transfer to an all-electronic system; time will determine whether multiple systems can be used.

CONCLUSION

With the growth of a global marketplace, our trading partners will begin to expect a more comprehensive and transparent national animal identification system. Using the tenets listed above, USCA believes that the Department can work with the industry to develop and establish an animal identification system that works for all producers. We, again, appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on this matter. Questions may be directed to our Washington, DC office at (202) 870-1552.

Sincerely,

Brooke Miller MD

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