

Animal ID: Despite Progress, Big Challenges Remain

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If there was a disease outbreak near your farm, you'd probably want to be one of the first to know what kind of livestock disease was found and how many animals were affected. Under a fully operational animal identification system, USDA would hope to provide you and others with that type of information within 48 hours.

But for a whole host of reasons, some of the same people who would stand to benefit from this type of traceability are fighting adoption of the system with both tooth and nail. Opponents cite concerns such as the cost, burdensome paperwork, and the overreach of government. As a result, USDA officials have struggled to get the first phase of the animal identification system in place: premises registration.

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced recently that 487,670 premises are registered as part of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). That's an improvement, but still represents only a little more than one-third of the estimated 1.4

million livestock and poultry premises in the United States. Cattle are located on 1,046,540 of the sites.

Producers have registered more than 50,000 premises so far in 2008 and 13 states now have at least 50 percent of their total estimated production premises registered through NAIS, APHIS said in a press release. The 13 states that have topped the 50 percent mark are Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Utah, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Nowhere near the halfway mark, however, are the top five states in terms of numbers of premises: Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Kentucky. Combined, these states account for 32 percent of premises nationwide but only

19 percent of registrations as of October 20, according to APHIS. (See table.) Twenty-nine percent of the total U.S. cattle and calf inventory as of January 1, 2008 was located in those states, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service figures.

Direct mail and outreach efforts to farmers and ranchers continue this fall to encourage additional registrations, the APHIS press release stated.

During an October 27 appearance on RFD-TV's "Monday Night Live" broadcast, USDA's Knight was asked by the program's host, Mike Adams of Agri-Talk, why more premises weren't enrolled.

"You've got to go at it one-on-one with farmers and ranchers around the country and talking to them about the importance of premise ID and its importance in disease control and eradication," Knight explained, pointing to Michigan, which has embraced premises registration to aid in surveillance and eradication of bovine tuberculosis. Three-fourths of Michigan's livestock premises are registered.

The vision and long-term goal for NAIS is 48-hour animal disease traceability. While APHIS acknowledges that achieving optimal traceabil-

State	Number of Premises	# Premises Registered	% of Premises Registered
Texas	187,118	32,169	17.2%
Missouri	79,018	14,794	18.7%
Oklahoma	71,420	9,365	13.1%
Tennessee	68,010	18,051	26.5%
Kentucky	61,251	14,440	23.6%

ity will be most challenging for the nation's cattle industry, "the growth in the number of premises registration with cattle is anticipated to grow steadily through 2010," the agency said in its Business Plan to Advance Animal Disease Traceability that was released to the public on September 24.

Under Secretary Knight said the USDA hopes that 70 percent of the cattle herd can be identified and traceable to their premises of origin within two years. "We think if we reach that level we have critical mass and will have greatly speeded up traceability in the event of a catastrophic disease outbreak."

Completing the task will be part of a lengthy "to do" list for a new Administration. And a new Congress will be watching, eager to see a new system up and running before the end of the decade. Δ

Editor Sara Wyant publishes a weekly e-newsletter covering farm and rural policy called Agri-Pulse. For a four-week free trial, go to www.Agri-Pulse.com.