

USDA To Develop New Framework For Animal Disease Tracking

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

The U.S. Agriculture Department will be developing a new framework to track animal disease and take other actions to strengthen disease prevention and response, according to Tom Troxel, Associate Department Head for Animal Science for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the moves after 'listening sessions' in 15 cities across the U.S. about the National Animal Identification System, as well as taking in thousands of comments from the public," he said.

The changes will:

- only apply to animals moved in interstate commerce;
- be administered by the states and Tribal Nations to provide more flexibility;
- encourage the use of lower-cost technology; and
- be implemented transparently through federal regulations and the full rulemaking process.

Troxel said that one of USDA's first steps will be convening a forum to include state animal health officials who will discuss ways of creating a flexible, coordinated, and effective system of animal disease traceability.

He sees advantages in the changes.

"First is that states are able to develop a system most beneficial for the way livestock is handled within their borders," Troxel said. "In Arkansas, this system will fall into the state

Livestock and Poultry Commission."

"Secondly, the rules only apply to livestock moving between states. This move will ease the burden on producers," he said, adding that it will be some time before the big picture of these changes is visible. "We'll have to wait and see what suggestions or conclusions come from the forum."

Past concerns over mad cow disease, foot and mouth disease make tracking the source and movement of disease critical to food supply safety.

Although USDA has a system in place to protect U.S. agriculture, USDA will also be taking several additional actions to further strengthen protections against the entry and spread of disease.

"USDA is looking at accelerating actions to lessen the risk from diseases such as tuberculosis that are posed by imported animals," Troxel said. USDA will also initiate and update analyses on how animal disease travel into the country, improve response capabilities, and focus on greater collaboration and analyses with states and industry on potential disease risk overall.

More information about USDA's new direction on animal traceability and steps to improve disease prevention and control can be found at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability>.

For more information about biosecurity in the Arkansas cattle industry, visit http://www.arkagriculture.org/biosecurity/producer/beef_cattle_operations.htm. Δ



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