

IMPACT



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Extension Assists Producers with Preparations for National Animal Identification

The Situation

The United States Department of Agriculture has identified a goal to track animals, their movements and their locations within 48 hours of a major disease discovery. To accomplish this task, animals must be individually identified. Electronic identification ear tags imprinted with a unique 15 digit number and embedded electronic identifier are being explored as the method for identification.

Our Response

Dr. James England, of the CAINE Veterinary Teaching Center, was able to secure grant funds to tag 7,600 head of cattle and examine the logistics, adaptability, practicality and retention of EID's (electronic identification device). Specific questions that needed to be answered were:

1. What is the retention rate of EID tags?
2. Is the technology compatible with normal corral "functions"?
3. Would the technology aid livestock managers in making management decisions?

Shannon Williams, Lemhi County Extension Educator, and Danielle Gunn, Fort Hall Extension Educator, were willing to work with producers to apply EID's and test the technology in the corral. Three Lemhi County beef producers, one beef cattle producer from Fort Hall, the Shoshone-Bannock Buffalo herd program from the Fort Hall Indian Reservation and seven beef producers from central Idaho are part of the pilot project. Tags were applied in mature cows and calves at spring vaccination, and

at branding times. When sufficient power was available, computers and software were utilized in the corral to record EID numbers, visual numbers and vaccination information. EID's were applied and visual tags recorded by hand when electricity wasn't available. Two different brands of tags were applied and three different software systems were utilized.



Lemhi County Producer, Jack Whitworth and son check and make sure EID is functioning correctly after being applied.

Program Outcomes

As of September 2005, 7,000 head of cattle have been tagged. Some of the questions about technology have been answered and some have not. The retention of the EID tags seven to ten months after application has been over 99%, and less than .5% of the tags have failed. Technology is not always compatible with normal corral functions. Cold, wet weather had an effect on laptop computers

and must be accounted for. A back-up plan is a requirement. Another challenge in the corral was the reading of tags while cattle were in the metal chutes and scales. One of the largest challenges is to read tags of large groups of animals without having to catch each one. Power to run the computer and reader is a huge issue that needs to be addressed and evaluated to determine economic feasibility. Technology is advancing to improve reader capabilities, but is not at a point that it is economical for individual producers.

Some producers only want to meet the minimum requirements of the draft rule that states that an animal will be individually identified at first sale. For those producers, they will continue to rely on traditional methods to make management decisions. For the producer who wants to utilize EID's in making management decisions, determining which software to use and incorporating it into the operation is the biggest challenge.

Livestock producers realize that individual animal identification is going to happen. They feel that by participating in the pilot project, they have the opportunity to help determine the "holes" in the technology and ways to improve it. For some producers, it has been a surprise at how easy the technology has been used in the corrals. All producers recognize that technology will be a part of the National Animal Identification System.

The pilot project has been funded for the 2006 year. Retail companies are continuing to improve the product, i.e. tags and readers. Extension Educators are becoming familiar with the capabilities of the tools and computer programs, and continue to adjust implementation and make recommendations.

For More Information

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