Guiding Principles for Beef Cattle Traceability

In July 2009, the federal agriculture minister and most of the provincial agriculture ministers committed to a mandatory comprehensive national traceability system for livestock by 2011, with the implementation of this system supported by national funding and regulatory framework. The ministers also committed to engage key industry groups on the timing of implementation for each species. They also committed that the Growing Forward policy framework and Agricultural Flexibility Fund will provide support for key elements of the national system.

In light of the ministers’ July 2009 agreement, the Alberta Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Alberta Beef Producers, Canadian Cattlemen’s Association, Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, Canadian Beef Breeds Council, Beef Industry Alliance and Livestock Inspection Services recognize the need to operate under a set of guiding principles for beef cattle traceability as these organizations work in partnership towards a national traceability system.

These organizations all share the common goal of strengthening our world class animal health and food safety system in Canada and recognize that traceability, which includes the three pillars of premises identification, animal identification and animal movement tracking, forms a key piece of such an animal health and food safety system.

In August 2007, the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association worked with its provincial member associations to develop a paper that clarified the industry position on the scope and implementation on traceability. The purpose of this document is to establish an acceptable common understanding of traceability among government and industry partners, based on the CCA principles, as we move to a national beef cattle traceability system.

For the purposes of these principles, movement tracking of beef cattle occurs only at those points of movement in the life of an animal where movement to a premise controlled by a different owner or operator takes place and at these points, data is submitted upon the arrival of the animal. For example, tracking of pasture to pasture movement would not be required when the producer is moving cattle within the producer’s own operation.

These traceability principles are explained further below:

Principles of Traceability for the Canadian Beef Cattle Industry

1. Traceability will support industry standards for commerce.

The technology utilized for traceability for the beef cattle industry will accommodate the way the industry conducts commerce. The highest volume of cattle is sold in the fall of each year at auction marts located around the provinces. At auction marts, several thousand calves per day are assembled, handled and transferred. In addition to auction marts, beef cattle are sold directly to feedlots and through other industry sales. The technology utilized for traceability will support industry standards at these points of handling or sale of cattle. Also, movement reporting to community pastures or other similar co-mingling sites should only be required when a suitable technology solution is found in partnership with industry.
2. **The traceability system for the beef cattle industry will enhance the competitive position of the industry.**

Traceability is a critical element of a robust and internationally recognized animal health and food safety system. Progressive implementation of traceability will occur only when there are identifiable benefits and the available technology results in acceptable incremental costs. Any cost will be assessed against a measurable value of real benefit such as the mitigation of foreign animal disease impacts, protection against loss of market access, increased market value, or enhanced market access. Identification of these benefits and a phased-in approach to implementation will encourage industry adoption and acceptance of traceability.

Those in the value chain, or in the regulatory environment, who receive benefit from the system should expect to bear their share of the cost of the system so that the primary producer is not overly or inequitably burdened in comparison to others.

3. **Traceability will expand as the appropriate technology to support initiatives is available.**

The expectation is that a reasonable rate of reading the ID tags respects the speed of normal commerce. For example, tags and readers need to be capable of functioning at an acceptable standard for lots or groups of cattle moving through an alley or weigh scale, rather than being read or scanned individually.

4. **Industry standards will drive tolerance ranges for tag readability and retention.**

All stakeholders recognize that the beef cattle tagging system that underpins traceability will not, under existing technology, achieve a rate of 100 percent tag retention or 100 percent readability. Establishing and accepting tolerance ranges and a practical enforcement policy will help industry and government implement a successful beef cattle traceability system.

5. **Producer information must remain confidential**

A producer’s information collected through the beef cattle traceability system is confidential unless a producer provides consent for disclosure, the collected data is disclosed in aggregate, or disclosure to government is necessary for dealing with animal health or food safety purposes.