

Comments of the Iowa Cattlemen's Association

at

USDA Listening Session

regarding

National Animal Identification System

Presented by:

Kent Pruismann, President

June 30, 2009

Omaha, Nebraska

My name is Kent Pruisman. I feed cattle, finish hogs and farm near Rock Valley in Sioux County, Iowa. Currently I am serving as President of the Iowa Cattlemen's Association (ICA). Our association represents over 9500 dues-paying members, and today I am speaking on behalf of our members who have given us clear direction regarding a national animal identification system.

Let me first thank you for adding this listening session here in the Midwest in close proximity to many livestock producers. We appreciate your efforts in providing us easier access to you as this important matter is discussed.

Although we recognize that animal identification is important to insure beef safety and to provide traceability of our nation's beef supply, we feel strongly that a standardized but **voluntary** system of identification will best serve our industry. A recently released cost-benefit study has indicated that implementation of a mandatory national animal identification system will cost the cattle industry \$200 million or more. Who will bear those costs? Ultimately, we, the producers and feeders, will directly or indirectly carry the burden. If a mandated identification system with substantial costs is imposed, it may provide producers an incentive to leave the business rather than to comply with its requirements. In today's economic times it would be devastating if the government imposed additional costs on a financially struggling industry.

A voluntary system of identification can work. A few years ago the Iowa Cattlemen's Association began offering an electronic identification system to our members. Over 165,000 EID tags have been merchandised to our members. Many have also chosen to have our certified staff members conduct PVP (Process Verified Production) audits allowing them to market age and source verified cattle. The point I would like to leave you with regarding ICA's identification program is that producers respond well to economic signals and not enthusiastically to mandates. Even during these recent tough economic times we have seen an increasing demand for our animal identification services.

Confidentiality is obviously also a concern to our membership. Under a Freedom of Information Act request USDA cannot guarantee that the animal ID database could be protected. Without such a guarantee our concerns about confidentiality are further legitimized.

Iowa has a very diverse cattle industry. Livestock auction markets play a central role and provide an essential service for many of our cow-calf producers as well as cattle feeders. In working and communicating with our colleagues in the livestock marketing industry we share their concern regarding being able to manage a system at the pace necessary to allow cattle to be marketed at what is known as the “speed of commerce”.

We urge USDA to prioritize and then further develop an identification system that will work for the livestock industry rather than mandating a system just for the sake of having one.

Thanks again for holding this listening session and for granting us the opportunity to share our thoughts. We will be available to work with you in the days to come as you consider next steps. Let me again emphasize that a voluntary animal identification system can have a very positive impact on the cattle industry!