

TAD News... Dec. 2004

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Managers Update

By John Cowan

As I reflect over the past 12 months, there are many things we need to stop and give thanks for and recognize how blessed we have been. It is a pleasure to work for and with dairy farmers across this state. My hopes and Prayers are for you to have a productive and peaceful New Year in 2005. My resolution for 2005 is to continue moving forward with the mission your TAD board of directors have set for your organization, and to insure your interest are represented to the highest standard.

Five Dairies in New Mexico have been served notice by a "concerned citizen group" out of Cloudcroft New Mexico, the Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation with intent to file suit on the five dairies for alleged violations of their EPA NPDES permit. Although similar to the suit filed by the City of Waco on 14 Texas Dairies last April, this suit is by individuals and not a municipality. EPA Region 6, which has jurisdiction for New Mexico and Oklahoma CAFO's has recently published a new General Permit which is under public comment presently.

Texas Legal Issue Update

The City of Waco Texas lawsuit filed on 14 dairies in Central Texas continues with dairymen sued facing decisions most of us would rather not have to be facing. TAD is working with these individual dairymen along with assistance of the Greater Southwest Agency to help offset some of the financial burden facing these dairies. It remains our belief that the City of Waco is exercising their strong arm tactics for political reasons rather than simply trying to fix their city water supply. We will continue to work in every arena we can to bring this matter to a resolve that doesn't leverage the Texas Dairy Industry with unfounded precedents. Our last information indicates this lawsuit is tentatively set for trial in May of 2005.

Texas Animal Health Commission

Premises Identification Program Ready Ranchers and other livestock facility owners from every facet of the Texas livestock and poultry industry can now sign up for a unique "premises identification number," for their livestock facilities. The premises identification number will identify the location of livestock operations in the state. It is the first step in implementing a national system for quickly tracing livestock and poultry for disease investigations or during a disease outbreak or animal health emergency. The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) also is launching a year-long pilot project with a number of ranches, feedlots, livestock markets, slaughter plants and other facilities to test the durability and reliability of electronic ear tags, related equipment and databases for identifying and tracking individual animals.

"The national premises and animal identification system has been under development for several years, with input and ideas from nearly 70 federal and state animal health agencies and livestock industry associations," said Dr. Bob Hillman, a member of the Secretary's Advisory Subcommittee on the National Animal Identification System. He serves as Texas' state veterinarian and heads the TAHC, the state's livestock and poultry health regulatory agency.

"The U.S. must have a reliable and efficient method for tracking and finding livestock and poultry during an animal disease investigation or when an animal health emergency occurs," Dr. Hillman said. He noted that producers and organizations have discussed at great length, the need for information to remain confidential. To protect data in regards to premises and animal identification, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state-level agencies, such as the TAHC, and livestock organizations and associations are seeking national and state legislation to protect the data from public release or access.

"Regulatory agencies do not need or want access to production data, but specific information, such as the age and class of animal, as well as movement information is critical for finding potentially infected or exposed animals during a disease situation," he said.

Today, it can take days to track the movement of livestock, to ensure that all exposed or diseased animals have been detected, Dr. Hillman pointed out. He predicted that, by 2008, when the national system is fully implemented and mandatory, tracking livestock movements could be streamlined, greatly enhancing disease eradication efforts. He stressed that the ability to rapidly identify animals and trace livestock or poultry movements is crucial to an effective animal disease response.

Dr. Hillman explained that the national animal identification system, also called "NAIS," has two major components. The first, he said, is the unique premises - or facility - identification, which identifies the location of livestock operations. This seven-character alphabetic and numerical 'address' is to be assigned to ranches and other sites where livestock or poultry are maintained or moved. Premises information will reside on a database, managed by each state and accessible only by animal health officials. Dr. Hillman said facility owners can obtain a premises identification number now by calling the TAHC's headquarters in Austin at 1-800-550-8242. By late January, ranchers and facility owners in Texas also may register online through the TAHC's web page at <http://www.tahc.state.tx.us>

"The second component of the national system-animal identification-- is ready for 'field-testing.' This involves the unique identification of each head of livestock moved from its original herd. For cattle, sheep, goats, cervidae (deer) and some other species of livestock, the identification device will be an electronic ear tag, also called a radio frequency (RFID) identification device. For other species, such as swine and poultry, the number can be applied to groups of animals, if they spend their entire production life together as a group or unit," he said.

"In Texas, we will work with specified ranches and livestock facilities, equipment suppliers and computer data service providers to test the effectiveness, durability and compatibility of equipment and databases for identifying and tracking individual animals," said Dr. Hillman.

"As many as 80,000 individually numbered electronic tags will be used by the pilot project participants, so cattle, sheep, goats or domestic deer can be identified prior to change of ownership or commingling with animals owned by other ranchers or farmers. The tags may be applied to animals before they leave the farm and ranch, or upon arrival at feedlots or order buyers' facilities, at livestock markets or other livestock sites. This will give facility owners and managers an opportunity to evaluate the system and calculate the costs and time involved with tagging animals, and collecting and reporting animal movement data. Implantable electronic devices will be used for identifying and tracking horses.

Unless a tag is broken or lost, an animal is to receive only one during its lifetime. The unique 15-digit number on each electronic ear tag or implantable device can be 'read and recorded' with a hand-held or stationary tag reader. Ear tags also are imprinted with the number, so the information can be accessed, even if readers are unavailable or out of service.

When identified animals are sold, moved or harvested, project participants will report the event to third-party data service providers by computer, fax or mail, Dr. Hillman explained. Animal tag numbers will be correlated in the database to premises identification 'addresses.'

A major aspect of the project will involve determining problems that occur when integrating information from several data collection systems into a central or common database. Ultimately, when an animal's number is queried, a report should list all the premise numbers where the animal had been maintained. Likewise, when a premise number is queried, the list of related animal identification numbers should appear. When an animal is harvested, its number will be retired.

DNA test could reveal threatening symptom in dairy cows, Researchers at Oregon State University have applied for a patent on a process to reduce hemorrhagic bowel syndrome or "dead-gut" disease in dairy cattle. The condition causes blood clotting in the small intestines that obstructs and enlarges the bowel in dairy cows, causing the animals to suffer severe distress and, in many cases, sudden death. Oregon State scientists have developed a diagnostic test using DNA to detect the syndrome. A standard DNA test called "polymerase chain reaction," or PCR, is used to analyze blood and tissue samples for presence the common mold *Aspergillus fumigatus*. The test was developed by Oregon State researcher Neil Forsberg and graduate student Steve Punttenney. Industry experts had believed that dead-gut could be caused by a common type of bacteria that affects both humans and animals. But Punttenney had a different theory about the cause after seeing cows tested and treated for bacterial infections, yet remain sick. He eventually tracked down the mold, and when he developed a feed additive to eliminate it, it proved effective. Forsberg said the new test is the only comprehensive test available to the U.S. dairy industry for detection of *Aspergillus* contamination. *Tuesday, December 28, 2004, 12:11PM by BobMeyer*

