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**RESOLUTION NUMBER: 32      APPROVED**

**SOURCE:                      COMMITTEE ON CATTLE AND BISON**

**SUBJECT MATTER:          FIELD TRIAL NEEDED TO EVALUATE ULTRA HIGH  
FREQUENCY RADIO-FREQUENCY IDENTIFICATION  
CATTLE BACK TAG FUNCTIONALITY WHEN COMBINED  
WITH AND COMPARED TO OTHER CATTLE  
IDENTIFICATION DEVICES**

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Official Cattle Back Tag has been an essential tool for many decades in traceability efforts through the Market Cattle Identification (MCI) program which focused on the eradication of brucellosis and tuberculosis. It is still USDA approved identification (ID) for cattle moving direct to slaughter from livestock markets or farm of origin and for various types of disease affected cattle moving under permit to slaughter. During this long period of usage, the back tag has been thoroughly integrated into the business processes of the livestock markets by creating a link between the seller and buyer, an essential component of the Animal Disease Traceability (ADT) program. When backtags are correlated with permanent official ID, it completes the circuit allowing traceability of official ID from seller to buyer. This is essential to transitioning from traditional forms of permanent official ID to futuristic models where all program animals have permanent ID readable at the speed of commerce.

In recent years, an electronic ultra-high frequency (UHF) radio-frequency identification (RFID) version of the tag has been developed that retains the visual and physical attributes of the existing back tag but can also be read accurately at the speed of commerce in virtually all cattle venues including feedlots, load outs, sale barns, and slaughter facilities. By correlation, this provides the capacity for cattle with traditional official permanent ID that typically cannot be read without going through a chute or narrow alley (Ex. National Uniform Identification System tags and low frequency RFID tags) to be read and recorded at the speed of commerce.

The field trials conducted thus far have been limited in duration (1-3 days) and have been mainly directed at testing tag readability at various distances and facility settings with different reading devices. These trials have shown that the UHF back tag can be read with very high accuracy at whatever movement speeds are typical for that facility.

To expand the cattle industry's understanding of the enhanced UHF backtags' capabilities and to evaluate their potential to improve ADT, more field trials are needed in which animal ID's are read at the speed of commerce and captured in facility software and then used for animal management and traceability purposes in livestock markets, slaughter facilities, and other animal movement activities. To support such an extended field trial(s) funds were appropriated in the 2017 USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service budget to provide funding for the ADT program to develop cooperative agreements with the various State Animal Health Officials or grants to cattle industry related organizations or entities, if appropriate. These are "no-year" funds that are still available since these trials have not yet occurred.

The information such trials generate could be extremely helpful to the decisionmakers in the cattle industry to determine what ID tools would be most useful in attaining the ADT goals of the future and transitioning to such.

These studies would not only serve as a proving ground for UHF backtags to bridge the gap found with traditional permanent ID and the speed of commerce, in essence providing tomorrow's traceability today, but additionally they could pave the way for the potential use of UHF eartags as the next generation of permanent official ID through the installation of readers, creation of a working familiarity with the technology, and by integrating software systems with readers at key locations."

#### **RESOLUTION:**

The United States Animal Health Association urges the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services to prioritize the development of cooperative agreements or grants with States or appropriate cattle industry organizations utilizing the designated appropriated funds to conduct long term field trials using ultra high frequency radio-frequency identification cattle back tags in selected livestock markets and subsequent downstream slaughter facilities to evaluate the usefulness of these enhanced back tags as animal disease traceability tools.

#### **INTERIM RESPONSE:**

USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services appreciates the recommendation from USAHA and the opportunity to respond. The USDA APHIS ADT program focuses on four overarching priorities for animal disease traceability: (1) electronic ID; (2) data sharing; (3) birth origin to slaughter termination tracing; and (4) electronic movement documentation. As USAHA notes, the integration of UHF backtags into animal handling processes could positively impact the ADT program priorities; particularly related to processes that traditionally required the use of a chute or alley.

As such, USDA is currently soliciting project proposals for grant and cooperative agreement funding. We will select projects based on the requirements of the 2017 Omnibus funding, and the goal of demonstrating the capability of UHF backtags, correlated with other official identification devices, to collect animal movement and disease program data without unduly impacting business operations (i.e., “the speed of commerce”). USDA anticipates selecting projects this year, and we look forward to the opportunity to evaluate the usefulness of enhanced backtags as a method for improving animal disease traceability.