RESOLUTION NUMBER: 19   APPROVED

SOURCE:       COMMITTEE ON CATTLE AND BISON

SUBJECT MATTER: Electronic Identification Required for Mexican-Born Rodeo Cattle

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
According to the United States Department of Agriculture Southern Border Ports, over 10,000 head of Mexican rodeo cattle were imported into the United States (US) in 2020. US stock contractors use Mexican cattle for rodeo circuits that traverse many states. Traceability of these animals from import to harvest is extremely difficult, if not impossible, because tags are often removed or are lost. State animal health officials familiar with this sport-cattle industry sector are aware that many of the animals retired from the rodeo circuit make their way onto private ranches for use as roping steers. Some end up in feedlots, but the majority may not be traceable. Mexican rodeo cattle present a significant risk to domestic beef and dairy cattle, given they live longer than feeder cattle, frequently move interstate, and may change ownership multiple times.

Besides the "M" brand requirement, individual identification requirements for Mexican rodeo type cattle are unclear. The US protocol for the importation of cattle from Mexico requires cattle to be individually identified with permanent or semi-permanent tamperproof official identification or the blue metal export ear tag. In 2019, Canada started requiring official electronic identification for all feeder cattle and recently imposed stricter tuberculosis (TB) testing rules for US rodeo cattle of the breeds Corriente, Brahman, Texas Longhorns, and American Bucking Bulls regardless of end-use in an attempt to better screen for TB prior to entry.

The adoption of official electronic ear tags to identify individual livestock improves tag reading accuracy, traceability, and speed of commerce. Electronic identification devices (EIDs) can be easily read, accurately captured, and permanently recorded on certificates of veterinary inspection (CVIs) for rapid tracking of an animal's movements. The "484" prefix indicates that the animal was born in Mexico and would allow for tracing to the farm of origin.

The risk of exposing domestic cattle to TB has significant consequences, considering that infected cattle may not be detected for ten or more years (Camacho, 2021). This delay
occurs because routine TB slaughter surveillance has limited detection capabilities. The estimated sensitivity of slaughter surveillance for beef herds in the US ranges from 3-7%, and the probability of detecting an affected beef herd within five years ranges from 15-35%, depending on herd size (USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health 2009). Mexican origin feeder and rodeo cattle are listed as one of the three most likely sources of TB introduction in the US (Camacho, 2021).

Despite tremendous efforts to eradicate Mycobacterium bovis from the US cattle herd for nearly a century, novel strains of TB continue to emerge in western states in beef and dairy herds with inconclusive epidemiological investigations. With the availability of EIDs, the US has an opportunity to make important changes to identification requirements for Mexican rodeo cattle, align import rules with those of Canada, and improve traceability to safeguard the domestic cattle herd.

RESOLUTION:
The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) urges the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services to require electronic 484 prefix official identification ear tags in addition to "M" branding for all rodeo type cattle born in Mexico (regardless of end use) that enter the United States. To further improve animal disease traceability, USAHA urges USDA to provide guidance on how to officially identify Mexican origin cattle that lose ear tags.

INTERIM RESPONSE:
The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services recognizes the concerns of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) and appreciates the opportunity to respond. While use of radio-frequency identification (RFID) is not required for all cattle imported from Mexico, VS is supporting a project that leverages technical capabilities to facilitate cattle exports from Mexico. This project allows importers to use Veterinary Services Process Streamlining (VSPS) for RFID-tagged rodeo cattle, spayed heifers, and steers from Chihuahua and Sonora. This project could potentially expand to other states, depending upon interest and availability of required technological infrastructure/equipment.

APHIS remains committed to leveraging technology, including use of RFID tags, to facilitate cattle imports and animal traceability. Until the time where RFID becomes the standard for domestic cattle identification, APHIS helps to ensure traceability of Mexican-origin cattle by requiring them to have an "M" brand as well as two forms of additional identification upon entry to the United States. APHIS requires both the blue metal ear tag, issued by Mexican State of origin, and the yellow SINIIGA tag, "official ID" recognized by Mexico’s Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria, for all cattle imported to the United States from Mexico.

APHIS is considering options to officially identify Mexican cattle that lose their official Mexican tags once imported. The initial options include moving cattle directly to slaughter or a terminal feedlot with a USDA backtag or using a non-840 RFID tag. APHIS looks forward to working with the committee and other stakeholders to evaluate the most viable options to further improve animal disease traceability.