

FAQs on the U.S. Animal Identification Plan

1. What is the U. S. Animal Identification Plan?

The U.S. Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) defines the standards and framework for implementing and maintaining a phased-in national animal identification system for the United States.

2. Why is this program needed?

A national animal identification system is needed to help protect American animal agriculture. This national plan, which identifies all food animals and livestock, will enhance disease preparedness by allowing the U.S. to identify any animals exposed to disease and will facilitate stopping the spread of that disease. In addition, it will provide benefits to industry in terms of market access and consumer demand. The USAIP will uphold the U.S.'s reputation for having a safe food supply and will promote continued confidence in agricultural or livestock products. Having a working system that allows for tracebacks to all premises that had direct contact with an animal with a foreign animal disease within 48 hours of discovery will reduce the financial and social impacts of such a disease.

3. Is this plan part of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL)?

No, the USAIP is not intended to be a part of Country of Origin Labeling. The plan's sole intent is to create the ability to track animal disease to its source within a 48-hour period.

4. Why 48-hour traceback capability?

To protect the health of the U.S. herd, sound scientific principles indicate that being able to track and contain a disease event within 48 hours is essential. For the industry to maintain consumer confidence and protect its economic viability, the industry will need to demonstrate its ability to meet this standard

5. What are the benefits for producers in adopting the U.S. Animal Identification Plan?

The adoption of a national identification system will help secure the health of the national herd. The program will provide producers and animal health officials with the infrastructure to improve efforts in current disease eradication and control, protect against foreign animal disease outbreaks and provide infrastructure to address threats from deliberate introduction of disease.

The industry may integrate the standards and technologies defined in the USAIP with their management systems and performance recording programs. The utilization of the same ID technologies for both regulatory and industry programs allows for the development of a more cost effective and user-friendly system for the producer. Producers can also benefit from additional animal identification information obtained to improve production efficiencies and add value to their products. However, the information systems are completely separate; production data will not be transmitted to nor maintained in the national identification databases.

6. How much will the program cost?

The plan for the program is currently being developed. Initial start-up costs will be different than the costs of a fully operational system in all 50 states.

7. Who will pay for the plan?

It is anticipated that the federal government and all industry stakeholders will share in the costs of an identification system.

8 Where do I get a premises ID?

The administration and maintenance of premises ID lies with each state's department of Agriculture. State departments will use a national mechanism to obtain a unique national premises ID, and will record additional information such as type of premises, contact name, address, and phone number to contact the person in charge of a premises. Key pieces of information will be sent to the national premises database that can be used in the case of a disease trace-back.

9. What forms of identification will be used?

The form of animal identification used is intended to optimize accuracy, promote efficient information transfer, and be practical and effective in its application for individual species and/or industries. Species groups will have the choice of designing a system that may or may not use accompanying visible ID. For example, the cattle industry plans to use radio frequency identification (RFID) technology using an eartag attachment.. Other species are exploring methods suitable for their industries, although effective official identification methods as described in the 9 CFR will be maintained for certain species. Electronic identification may be necessary for efficient and accurate data collection and animal tracking in some species or in particular animal movement scenarios. Official identification tags will not replace management ear tags unless the species groups establish those options. Ultimately it is anticipated that technological advances will allow for one tag or ID device that performs multiple functions. Implants (i.e., microchips) may be permitted for certain species in which no other form of ID is suitable and assuming that the implant site has been approved by the FDA and FSIS relative to ease of discovery at slaughter when appropriate.

10. Where do I get an official ID tag or device?

Currently the distribution mechanism for ID devices is being discussed. It has not been decided where and how a producer can obtain official ID devices at this time. Different species will have different requirements in regards to the type of device that can be used, however standards in regards to RFID technology and code structure, and retention will ensure that various ID devices can be read with RFID readers that meet the same RFID technology standards.

11. Will producers need to have a radio frequency identification (RFID) reader?

Radio frequency (RF) technology is the form of electronic identification that is currently being considered. Producers that have livestock that utilize RFID for official identification will not necessarily need to have a RFID reader. For example, the producer will be able to record the RFID code of the electronic device before it is applied to an animal and cross-reference the code with a visual-tag number. This will allow them to maintain a record of the RFID code without having to read (scan) the transponder. For cattle, the plan calls for the utilization of a RFID eartag attachment on which the RFID code is to be printed for visual readability. While reading and recording the RFID code manually is not ideal, it can be achieved.

An array of readers will be available on the market; ones that merely read and display the RFID code to ones that are attached to an advanced handheld computer. Palm type devices encased together with a built in reader are becoming quite popular.

12. Who will pay for RFID readers and their installation in markets and slaughter plants? Who will pay for the electronic identification devices?

The plan is being developed as an industry-government partnership, so it is expected that industry and the government will share the cost of the necessary elements. Exactly how those costs will be shared is currently under discussion within the various Species Working Groups.

13. If I am currently using an ID program through a private service or marketing alliance, will my ID be usable in the USAIP?

Yes, assuming the program you are using will be compliant with the official USAIP standards.

14. Should I, or my State Cattle Association, consider options for aligning ourselves with a database management provider so I can be sure I comply with the USAIP?

The Steering Committee would characterize such action as premature. There is definitely no urgency as no immediate implementation requirements have been established. The Steering Committee, and in the future, the USAIP Oversight Board, will clearly communicate dates that will call for action or producer-participation. The program will be phased in over time, and an adequate transition period will be established for producers to work into the system.

The USDA is taking necessary steps to have the standards established as official; the U.S. Animal Identification Number is an example. The standards established in the USAIP are to be recognized as official so industry initiatives that are developing programs containing an ID component may start to incorporate them if they so desire. Additionally, this will allow the standards to be used in various pilot projects that are being formulated. Also, please note that the timetables outlined in the USAIP are target dates, which will be updated through consensus of the Species Working Groups.

15. Who will be responsible for ID application in livestock?

During the phase in period, animals will need to be identified as they leave whatever premises they are on regardless of where they were born. After the first few years of the

program, identifying animals will be the responsibility of the “premises of birth” producers. For producers who lack equipment for individual identification, tagging stations will be available.

16. What is a tagging station and where will such stations be located?

A tagging station is an entity operating from a fixed location that has been officially approved by USDA/APHIS to apply ID devices to animals that are being moved into commerce. The USAIP work plan recognizes that not all producers will have facilities to individually tag animals before they leave the farm. Therefore, producers who are required to individually tag animals that leave the farm can elect to truck animals to an approved tagging station and pay the operator of the tagging station a fee to apply individual animal ID devices and report the ID information to the central database. Such tagging stations may include, but not be limited to an existing livestock marketing facility, a veterinary clinic, a fairgrounds or a facility specifically dedicated to performing tagging services.

17. What data will be required to be kept, by whom and in what form?

This part of the plan is under development. It is anticipated that the final plan will be user-friendly such that it will be easy for all stakeholders to implement and make part of their daily practice. Ideally animal movements will be electronically tracked and sent from the stakeholders to the central database. For the plan to be successful, this key part, i.e. data entry, will need to be easy to follow, thus achievable in real-time such that data entry becomes a routine management practice.

Only essential information will be reported to the central database. In the case of individual animals, this is: 1) an US AIN (US Animal Identification Number), 2) the premises ID that the US AIN was seen at or allocated to, and 3) the date it was seen or allocated. Additional information that can be important in a disease trace-back such as species, breed, sex, age or date of birth can also be reported if available. In the case of group or lot movements, the key data are the groups’ Lot ID number, the premises ID the Lot ID number was seen at, and the date it was seen. If species is available, this can also be provided to the central database.

The goal of the work plan is to work with existing information systems so additional recording of information by producers and auction markets is minimized.

18. Who will have access to information in the National Animal ID Databases?

Only state and federal health officials will have access to the premises and animal ID information when performing their duties to maintain the health of the national herd. Proper safeguards are being researched and will be put in place to ensure that the data is protected from public disclosure.

19. What species are included in the program?

Currently, the species include beef, dairy, swine, and sheep. It is anticipated that equine, aquaculture, poultry, goats, camelids, cervids and any other species deemed necessary to protect animal agriculture will be included in the future.

20. Will this be a mandatory program?

Efforts are geared toward developing a national animal identification program that will provide for the ability to rapidly track animals exposed to a disease concern, and will meet the needs of producers, animal industries, domestic and international markets and consumers. The plan still needs to be completed and the system needs to be tested to be sure it is effective and workable. Incremental implementation of the plan as development continues will allow for potential problems within the system to be identified and the plan modified to address those problems. Ultimately there needs to be full compliance for the system to work as effectively as it should. Once the USAIP has been finalized, considered workable and accepted by industry, it is likely that industry and market forces will drive the process towards full compliance. At that time, USDA will work with industry and state partners to achieve full participation with the USAIP.

21. Will I be able to sell my livestock if they are not officially identified?

Yes, as the plan will begin as a voluntary program. Over time some markets may require animals to be identified that are not identified now. Species where ID is currently required will continue to have to be identified prior to entering commerce, i.e. sheep and goats under the national Scrapie eradication program.

As the program is phased in, all animals of covered species will be encouraged to have premises identification, and eventually individual identification, prior to sale. For producers who lack facilities to apply identification devices at the premises of birth, there will be provisions for initiating the process at the point of sale.

22. Can animals be identified as a group?

Yes an animal production system can use Group/Lot identification if the producer is able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of state animal health officials that, through group identification and production records, traceback to all premises with direct contacts of a suspect animal can occur in 48 hours. Each group will be identified with a unique and standardized number. Verifiable records will be required to further document premises ID and dates of movement.

23. What are the penalties for not using the program?

At this point, the USAIP is not fully developed and producers are not yet required to comply with any rules. When the plan is finished, the market forces may drive the process towards compliance.

24. What are the liability issues of this program for producers?

Producers are, and have always been responsible for the livestock they produce. If practices are employed that would endanger consumers at any level the producer responsible for creating that threat could have increased liability. Merely having the animals identified through the USAIP will neither increase nor decrease that liability.

Effective traceability can help protect producers who apply best management practices. The system can help limit liability and narrow the scope of eradication efforts in the case

of a disease emergency by being able to document that appropriate and responsible measures were followed.

25. What is the timeline for implementing this program?

Several steps need to be completed before the USAIP could be fully implemented, however the USAIP recommends that:

- All states have a premises identification system initiated by July, 2004;
- Unique, individual or group/lot numbers be available for issuance by the middle of 2004;
- All cattle, swine, and small ruminants possess individual or group/lot identification for interstate movement by July 2005;

- All animals of the remaining species/industries identified above be in similar compliance by July 2006.

These standards will apply to all animals **in commerce** within the represented industries regardless of their intended use as seedstock, commercial, pets or other personal uses.

26. Who has developed this plan?

The National Animal Identification Development Team has developed the USAIP. It is a group of approximately 100 animal and livestock industry professionals representing over 70 associations, organizations, and government agencies. Development has been a voluntary effort by all participants working collaboratively to establish an effective national animal identification plan.

27. Who is on the Team?

Individuals on the team include producers, animal and livestock association and organizational representatives, and State and Federal governmental animal production and health professionals. Represented industries include beef, dairy, swine, sheep, goats, and cervids. Other species groups are welcome and encouraged to participate.

28. What government entities will have oversight of this plan?

In keeping with the aim of the program to safeguard the health of the U.S livestock population through disease surveillance and monitoring, that includes trace back to individual animals within 48 hours, it is envisioned that USDA-APHIS will administer the program. Further, the plan calls for governance as a joint federal-state responsibility with industry input. To ensure uniformity of operations across the U.S., APHIS and individual state animal health entities will develop and administer key regulatory elements of the plan.

29. What will be the ID requirements for animals entering the United States from other countries?

Animals entering the country will be subject to the same identification requirements as animals in the U.S. that move interstate and/or through commerce. Currently, various species working groups are defining species-specific identification requirements.

30. With the phase-out of existing official animal identification devices by July 2005, what will happen with Brucellosis vaccination tags? Will they still be used?

The USAIP does not yet specify how it will affect the animal identification protocols currently associated with the Brucellosis eradication program. It is likely that Brucellosis vaccination tags will be phased out gradually as individual vaccination records are included in the database linked to each USAIN.

31. What will happen with the national Scrapie eradication program's ID system?

With uniformity and consistency being key objectives of the USAIP, the U.S. Animal Identification Number (USAIN) will become the official number for use in the Scrapie eradication program. It is likely that animals currently Identified through other official plans/programs will be "grandfathered" into the program, meaning producers will phase in the USAIN on animals Identified for the first time after a mutually acceptable date.

32. Where can interested stakeholders go to obtain more information about this plan?

The primary source of up-to-the-minute information is www.usaip.info - an interactive, user-friendly website that provides details on the development of the plan as well as specific information directed at the segments of the livestock industry involved in the identification effort. Also, fact sheets, brochures, and other forms of media will be developed to target those needing information on the USAIP.

33. Is there still time to have input into the plan?

The U.S. Animal Identification Development Team is seeking comments from all interested individuals. The comment period runs until January 31, 2004. You can send comments

- ◆ from the USAIP web site --- www.usaip.info
- ◆ ,
- ◆ by faxing (719) 538-8847 or
- ◆ by mailing to USAIP Comments, 660 Southpointe Court, Suite 314, Colorado Springs, CO 80906.

Species-specific working groups are being formed to provide input to the USAIP. Final reports are to be submitted to the National Animal Identification Development Team Steering Committee by April 1, 2004. To find out who represents your species on a species-specific working group, contact Neil Hammerschmidt at Neil.E.Hammerschmidt@aphis.usda.gov or look on the www.usaip.info website.