

► **Left and below:** The final rule for the animal disease traceability system includes the use of brands, tattoos and brand registration as official identification when accepted by the shipping and receiving states or tribes.

Animal ID

USDA issues final rule for animal disease traceability.

The USDA on Dec. 20, 2012, announced a final rule establishing general regulations for improving the traceability of U.S. livestock moving interstate.

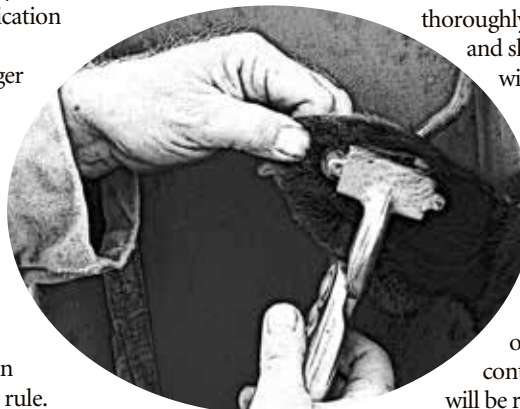
“With the final rule announced today, the United States now has a flexible, effective animal disease traceability system for livestock moving interstate, without undue burdens for ranchers and U.S. livestock businesses,” said Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack. “The final rule meets the diverse needs of the countryside, where states and tribes can develop systems for tracking animals that work best for them and their producers, while addressing any gaps in our overall disease response efforts. Over the past several years, USDA has listened carefully to America’s farmers and ranchers, working collaboratively to establish a system of tools and safeguards that will help us target when and where animal diseases occur, and help us respond quickly.”

Under the final rule, unless specifically exempted, livestock moved interstate would have to be officially identified and accompanied by an interstate certificate of veterinary inspection or other documentation, such as owner-shipper statements or brand certificates.

After considering the public comments received, the final rule has several differences from the proposed rule issued in August 2011. These include:

- Accepting the use of brands, tattoos and brand registration as official identification when accepted by the shipping and receiving states or tribes;
- Permanently maintaining the use of back tags as an alternative to official ear tags for cattle and bison moved directly to slaughter;
- Accepting movement documentation other than an Interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (ICVI) for all ages and classes of cattle when accepted by the shipping and receiving states or tribes;
- Clarifying that all livestock moved interstate to a custom slaughter facility are exempt from the regulations; and
- Exempting chicks moved interstate from a hatchery from the official identification requirements.

Beef cattle younger than 18 months of age, unless they are moved interstate for shows, exhibitions, rodeos or recreational events, are exempt from the official identification requirement in this rule.



These specific traceability requirements for this group will be addressed in separate rulemaking, allowing the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) to work closely with industry to ensure the effective implementation of the identification requirements.

For more specific details about the regulation and how it will affect producers, visit www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability.

Animal disease traceability — or knowing where diseased and at-risk animals are, where they’ve been and when — is very

important to ensure a rapid response when animal disease events take place. An efficient and accurate animal disease traceability system helps reduce the number of animals involved in an investigation, reduces the time needed to respond, and decreases the cost to producers and the government.

The notice was published in the Jan. 9 *Federal Register*. The final rule will take effect 60 days later: March 11. To read the rule, visit www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-01-09/pdf/2012-31114.pdf.

Industry weighs in

“From the Secretary’s comments, NCBA is encouraged that many of the priorities of cattlemen and women have been considered in this final rule,” said Kathy Simmons, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) chief veterinarian in NCBA’s official response to USDA’s announcement. She also

noted that NCBA was in the process of thoroughly reviewing the rule and sharing its findings with members.

“Cattlemen and women are looking for a rule that does not come with additional costs and does not hinder the speed of commerce,” she continued. “Brands will be recognized when

accompanied by an official brand inspection certificate as means of official identification for cattle. The rule will also allow flexibility in tagging procedures and paperwork. Most important to cattle producers is the Secretary's announcement of separate rulemaking for beef cattle under 18 months of age.

"Raising healthy cattle is a top priority for cattlemen. NCBA remains supportive of an animal disease traceability program for cattle health purposes. We commend APHIS for its efforts to listen to concerns of America's cattlemen in developing this traceability program. NCBA encourages the agency to

continue working with industry leaders on this and all animal health issues."

"The final rule is far less onerous when compared to what the government has been pushing for years: premises registration, mandatory electronic ear tags, centralized database of producer information, inclusion of all cattle regardless of age, and the removal of hot-iron brands as official identification devices," said Kenny Fox, Animal ID Committee chairman for the Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA).

R-CALF USA's membership took a

position against USDA's early attempts to implement the final rule's precursor, the previously proposed National Animal Identification System (NAIS). Vilsack announced the death of NAIS in early 2010, citing widespread opposition from independent cattle producers and the need to reverse producer mistrust for the USDA as grounds for his decision.



Editor's Note: *This article was compiled with news releases from the USDA, NCBA and R-CALF USA.*