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**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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COMMENTS ON MICHIGAN'S ELECTRONIC IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR CATTLE**

Animal identification has been an integral part of Michigan's animal disease eradication programs for decades. In August 2001, the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) initiated an electronic cattle identification tracking system as part of its bovine Tuberculosis (TB) Eradication Program. Electronic identification was initially used to individually identify and track the movement of cattle in a TB high-risk area/infected zone (Modified Accredited Zone [MAZ]), which was comprised of 11 counties and two partial counties in northeast Michigan. This project was funded in part by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants to assist Michigan's Tuberculosis Eradication Program.

The merit of the electronic based ID system was immediately realized: the TB whole-herd testing time was reduced by as much as 50% once cattle were tagged with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags. Additionally, tracking cattle with an electronic identification (EID) system provides assurance that all mechanisms of control, monitoring, and surveillance are employed to their fullest capabilities.

Since the initiation of the EID system, one TB positive cow was diagnosed and traced back to the herd of origin. This particular cow had met the TB movement requirements and had been moved legally out of the infected zone. The herd of origin's TB testing history, and all cattle movements after the index cattle departed, **were traced in less than fifteen minutes.** Without the use of EID and the electronic database, this process could have taken weeks.

The EID system has also enabled MDA to develop a web-based movement permit system for cattle. The web-based system allows MDA to issue a movement permit online if all testing requirements have been met. Producers can then print the permit or receive it by fax or mail.

On April 19, 2004, USDA established two separate zones with different TB risk classifications in Michigan—the Modified Accredited Zone (MAZ) and the Modified Accredited Advanced Zone (MAAZ). Beginning on June 1, 2004, all cattle of all ages were required to have electronic identification and a movement permit before leaving a premises within the MAZ and all cattle were tagged with EID during TB testing.

As part of its effort to obtain TB Free Status for the Upper Peninsula, MDA expanded its EID program to include the Upper Peninsula. MDA offered a 50/50 cost-share program in August 2004 to cattle producers in the Upper Peninsula who wished to obtain EID tags to identify cattle leaving the farm in support of the free status application. Over 600 producers ordered over 65,000 tags during the cost share program. The Upper Peninsula was granted TB Free Status in September 2005.

On January 9, 2006, the Michigan Commission of Agriculture adopted a policy mandating RFID for cattle in Michigan effective March 1, 2007. MDA, in partnership with industry and stakeholder groups, was charged with developing an implementation plan. Cattle are the only species of farm animals required to be identified electronically in Michigan.

A communication strategy was developed and implemented which targeted key audiences to develop their understanding of the role RFID plays in the Bovine Tuberculosis Program. The communication strategy addressed the concerns of the farming community as MDA moved from a free identification ear tag to a producer purchased RFID tag. The communication strategy focused on how RFID tags can improve animal health, human health, and food safety.

The communication strategy recognized the importance of sharing information with all producer groups and other interested persons. All livestock producers were sent a letter explaining the RFID requirements and a *Question and Answer* document. Livestock markets assisted with outreach to inform their clientele about the identification program. MDA produced a brochure and fact sheet which were distributed at county fairs.

Nearly 60 educational workshops and industry meetings were held across the state. Outreach, both at the grass roots level and through statewide marketing, was vital to the success of the EID project. Well over 3,000 cattle producers attended the meetings which allowed MDA to disseminate a positive message about the program to producers from key leaders.

MDA sponsored cattle handling and ID tagging demonstrations at the July 2006 and July 2007 Ag Expo. Six informational seminars/tagging demonstrations were presented during the 3-day events. Nearly 1,000 people participated in the presentations.

By March 2007, 90-98% of cattle coming into Michigan livestock auction markets were tagged with RFID tags. MDA's program allows for cattle producers who are unable, or object to RFID tags, to bring cattle to the markets untagged. Untagged cattle are tagged at the markets and the producer is charged a fee. This procedure allows MDA to maintain the integrity of its animal identification program while respecting the views of some producers who object to the program on religious or other grounds.

By October 5, 2007, Michigan cattle producers had purchased over one million RFID ear tags. Over 11,000 Michigan premises supported this milestone. In addition, there are over 19,400 premises in Michigan registered in the Standard Premises Registration System (SPRS).

Between April 2006 and December 31, 2008, 15,661 cattle producers have ordered 1,718,593 RFID tags. All Michigan livestock markets and eight slaughter facilities are equipped with stationary panel readers or wand readers capable of reading any RFID ear tag. As of December 31, 2008, livestock markets had scanned 480,776 tags and slaughter facilities had scanned 332,888 tags.

The success of Michigan's mandatory cattle identification program can be attributed to the partnership established between producers, agricultural businesses, and state and federal government agencies. Michigan's accomplishments have built a foundation on which other states can build in developing their cattle traceability programs. Michigan would highly encourage other states and the federal government to use Michigan's model for cattle traceability to improve animal health. The EID program has created efficiencies on the farm and in the Department and allows staff to focus on public safety.

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