

MINUTES OF THE SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Derek Schmidt at 8:30 a.m. on March 9, 2004 in Room 423-S of the Capitol.

All members were present.

Committee staff present:

Raney Gilliland, Legislative Research
Lisa Montgomery, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Robert Myers, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Dale Blasi - Professor, Kansas State University
Neil Hammerschmidt - United States Department of Agriculture

Others attending:

See Attached List.

Dale Blasi appeared before the committee in order to give a briefing on animal identification. He started out by noting the predominant role that is played by the beef industry in Kansas, noting that the industry saw approximately 4.8 billion dollars in cash receipts during the calendar year of 2002. He pointed out too that there are approximately 1.5 million head of beef cattle in the state. He then noted that we are an import state, in that we bring in cattle from around the world. Turning then to the need for the implementation of an animal identification system, he stated that its primary purpose would be to provide the infrastructure necessary to actively contain any emerging or intentionally placed diseases. Furthermore, he stated the purpose of this system in strengthening the now weakened consumer confidence in the beef industry. Finally, he pointed out that the identification system would allow opportunities for further improving the efficiency of beef cattle production. Dale then expressed to the committee that this is not an issue of consumer labeling, but rather one revolving around animal health.

Dale continued by identifying major issues/concerns that surround the proposed animal identification plan: privacy, liability, and cost. He also emphasized that the concept being dealt with is one of a phased-in national identification system whose overall goal is to identify within 48 hours not only animals but also premises that have been potentially exposed to a disease. Specifically, he described the United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) as consisting of three phases:

1. Premise identification, to be enacted by July 1, 2004.
2. Individual identification of animals moving via intrastate commerce, to be enacted in 2005.
3. Individual identification of animals moving via interstate commerce, to be enacted in 2006.

Dale then turned his attention to electronic identification. He touched upon the benefit of using an electronic system as opposed to the traditional hand-written means of identification. He showed the committee a series of slides showing potential problems with relying on a hand-written system, for example ambiguous penmanship. He stated that this traditional system is not only tedious but also that it is not an efficient means of transferring information as animals are moved within the system. He further expressed the belief that visual identification alone is not sufficient by giving the following reasons:

- It does not identify animals as unique individuals that correlate back to a single herd
- It does not indicate herd of origin
- It does not meet the international requirements as a valid form of identification
- It does not facilitate the recall or collection of information in an accurate or timely manner

Dale described the proposed electronic identification system as consisting of the following components:

- Individual tags or transponders
- Electronic reader
- Computer
- Necessary software

He then proceeded to pass around to the committee members several variations of transponders being considered for the electronic system. He described the electronic identification system used at Kansas State University, stating that a hand-held reader with an effective range of about 8-12 inches is used. He

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described the system in place there as being very comparable to the bar code scanning system used commonly in grocery stores. The committee members were then shown a brief video demonstrating the use of the above-mentioned system with a herd of cattle at Kansas State University.

Dale submitted to the committee a booklet entitled *A Guide for Electronic Identification of Cattle* created by the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service (Attachment 1).

Neil Hammerschmidt appeared before the committee in order to also give a briefing on animal identification. He identified the finding last year of a Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) positive cow in Washington state as being the stimulus which has intensified the interest in implementing a national animal identification system here in the United States, having the purpose of protecting animal health. He stated that although there is currently no nationwide animal identification system in this country, some segments of certain species are required to be identified as part of a current program entitled Disease and Ratification Activities. In addition, he noted the current presence of some voluntary regional identification programs. Also, he pointed out that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has funded various animal identification pilot projects over the past five years. He identified the proposed United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) as describing an information system or infrastructure to enable the identification, within a period of 48 hours, of all animals and premises potentially exposed to a disease. He stressed to the committee that the USAIP is not a USDA program, but rather is a plan being developed through industry and government cooperation and is being reviewed by the USDA. He then noted the current use of animal identification systems in Europe and Canada, as well as the proposed use of such systems in countries like New Zealand and Australia.

Neil listed the following lessons as having been learned as a result of the projects of the United States and the rest of the world:

1. It is critically important to get the support of industry as an animal identification program is being shaped in the United States.
2. There is no one-size-fits-all technology
3. Both private and public funding will be necessary for the animal identification system to become fully operational.

Furthermore, he noted that a major component of implementing a national program will be the education of livestock producers and processors. He emphasized this point by explaining that, under such a program, the producers and processors would be responsible for registering animals and recording their movements.

Neil expressed the belief that the Animal Health Protection Act gives the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), specifically the Secretary of Agriculture, the authority to implement an animal identification system, either mandatory or voluntary, as is being currently proposed. He then summarized the goals of the USDA with regard to the establishment of an animal identification system:

- The system should allow producers, to the extent possible, the flexibility to use current systems and to adapt new ones.
- The system should be technology neutral in order to allow for flexibility..
- The national identification system should use and build upon the data standards developed within the United States Animal Identification Plan.
- The system must not prevent producers from being able to use it with production management systems that respond to market incentives
- The architecture of a national identification system must be designed so that the system does not unduly increase the role of the government.

Neil next turned his focus to the funding of the identification plan, stating that the President's budget proposed 33 million dollars to fund the system implementation activities for the fiscal year 2005. He further stated that, at this time, no funds have been appropriated for the fiscal year 2004.

Neil described the phased-in approach being proposed for the identification plan, noting that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to move forward with the national program in the current year, 2004. He said that first the program would be implemented on a voluntary basis, followed later by

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the mandatory identification of both animals and premises.

Neil also touched upon the issue of funding for animal identification tags, stating that it was not envisioned at this point that federal funding would be used. The funding for electronic readers, however, could be accommodated under some agreements.

Neil brought to the attention of the committee the role to be played by the individual states under the United States Animal Identification Plan:

- Maintain a state premises database system
- Submit premises data to a national premises repository
- Maintain an intrastate animal movement database
- Report interstate movement to a national identification database

Neil next summarized the federal role to be played (i.e., by the United States Department of Agriculture):

- Allocate United States Animal Identification numbers
- Administer the national premises repository
- Administer the National Animal Identification values

Neil concluded by saying that the United States Department of Agriculture supports the advancement of the United States Animal Identification Plan.

Senator Huelskamp moved to approve the minutes from the February 3, 4, 10, and 11 meetings, seconded by Senator Lee. The motion carried.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 10, 2004.