

Perspective from the Oklahoma City ADT Meeting

About 70 people attended the meeting in Oklahoma City on April 11, 2017. The attendees included a significant number of government officials and staff from both USDA and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. The remainder of the attendees was mostly representatives of Farm Bureau, Oklahoma Cattlemen's, livestock auction owners and trade organizations, and a few large producers.

One USDA speaker repeatedly focused on international trade, specifically China, making claims such as traceability plays prominently in international trade and is on the USDA's top 10 priority list. The USDA officials were not neutral listeners: they repeatedly pushed the idea that the current ADT system is insufficient. Several of the USDA speakers focused heavily on electronic systems as a solution. Only one USDA official made the point that the meetings were supposed to be focused on the current ADT program and getting the public's input on that.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, several livestock auction owners spoke in support of 100% mandatory animal ID; their comments included many disparaging remarks about small cattle owners as "country traders" and sources of diseases. The remarks conveyed that smaller producers either needed to get on board with 100% Animal ID or be eliminated.

One large rancher stated that he was on a NCBA working committee with plans to recommend and promote 100% Animal ID at their next meeting. He had no use for "country traders" -- if they couldn't comply, they should go out of business.

Only one of the public commenters raised the perspective of independent producers. The speaker pointed out that the export market only benefits a few industrial producers, not the average rancher, and that there are untapped markets for grass-fed livestock and small cooperatives which already have traceability because of their systems and customer relations. For such producers, RFID isn't economical or appropriate, and a NAIS-type system would be too expensive from a paperwork, equipment, and labor perspective. The speaker pointed out that it may be suitable to have a "tiered" system so that the producers who want to export beef could opt into RFID, while independent ranchers would be exempt.

One of the livestock auction business remarked he liked the idea of a tiered system because older ranchers are a significant portion of his market and they would be driven out of business if a national ID system was mandated. He remarked that many sellers did not have ability to work their cattle, regardless of whether higher values were paid.

After the short open mike portion of the meeting, there was a panel to discuss ADT experience in the "real world." The panel was made up of two livestock auction

owners, two dairymen (one representing OCA and NCBA, and one with a 4,500 cow operation), and a state vet. Representatives from a national livestock organization, the USDA, and a Farm Bureau representative interjected comments. While some of the panel members raised concerns about issues such as cost (especially when bull calves were bringing \$1 to \$10), producer confidentiality, and whether China would open its market with or without traceability, most of them supported a complete, 100% animal ID program.

Overall, the majority of industry representatives repeatedly made comments that every head of livestock should require a national uniform tag. Some said uniform RFID tags should be required for disease traceability because the "people in the country do not castrate, vaccinate or tag livestock". Industry reps and USDA staff repeatedly stressed concerns about foot and mouth disease.

When the breakout groups' spokesmen presented, they indicated the consensus was for a national uniform ID for food safety, trade and disease prevention/control and trace back. The meeting concluded with a few sentences from the USDA indicating that they had targeted the "industry" and they had showed up and spoken.

Recommendation: Independent ranchers need to attend and provide input at each of the upcoming scheduled meetings, as well as through written comments, to head off a mandated national animal ID system. The promoters of the system will use fears of disease and food safety (even though animal ID does nothing for food safety) to generate public support in their quest to promote exports and monopolize livestock ownership.