

BENEFITS OF IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

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Farm animal identification and traceability (I & T) are essential components of a 'farm-to-fork' approach towards animal health and food safety. This 'farm-to-fork' approach helps ensure that food production and distribution systems deliver safe food, at affordable prices, to consumers. In highly developed economies with complex food chains, they are indispensable to the smooth operation of the market. In the international market, they help to provide confidence to importing countries regarding the safeguards offered by exporting countries. In this regard, it is important to harmonise national systems with international standards, which, in the case of I&T for animals and animal products, are the standards established by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

In the absence of reliable I & T systems, there are potential flaws in control systems which create important risks to both food safety and market stability. When these flaws are brought to light, inevitably there are damaging impacts on the credibility of control systems, and on consumer confidence and market stability. All parties have a strong interest, therefore, in ensuring that there are effective I & T systems in place.

Reliable I & T systems are the bedrock of effective animal disease systems. They are key components of good disease surveillance, and establish the ability to quickly and accurately track animal movements should the need arise. They are also necessary to encourage the required investment in disease eradication measures, and to the protection of that investment. At farm level, they are invaluable components of good animal husbandry systems. Through I & T, farmers can better identify not only disease patterns, but also more easily collect and analysis commercially important data on yields, feed conversion, fertility, etc.

As animal products are such a significant input to the food processing sector, I & T systems for farm animals help ensure that input materials are safe and that any problems can be quickly traced to their source, including to the herd of origin. They also facilitate record keeping, stock controls and product differentiation. They assist food producers and retailers to fulfil their regulatory obligations and to protect their brand image and reputation.

I & T systems must nonetheless be cost effective, workable and proportionate to the risks they seek to address. This includes taking account of the international health, trade and development dimensions.

Key words: Identification and traceability – Animal disease – Food safety – OIE standards.