

BENEFITS OF IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY- LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND MARKET PLACE REALITY

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Objectives

A major food safety incident, particularly where the potential effects may arise in a number of countries, brings into sharp focus the issue of food traceability.

Effective food safety programmes must include food chain traceability, which are themselves predicated on and driven by effective animal identification systems. The animal identification system when first developed may have had a number of intended outcomes, other than food safety, such as determination of ownership, routine animal health management at individual farm level, animal disease control programmes at local, regional, national and global levels, enhanced breeding programmes and ultimately ensuring market access.

It is no coincidence therefore that the positioning of the design and implementation of animal identification systems is given such priority in the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code 2008*, appearing as it does in Chapter 4.2.

Ultimately the major benefits to be derived from an OIE based animal identification system are enhanced food safety and greater consumer confidence in the livestock products placed on the market place.

The implementation of an internationally acceptable animal identification system, such as that developed by OIE provides additional credibility to a national programme, as potential trading partners, particularly those who are member countries of OIE, will be familiar with and have contributed to its development through their participation in the General Assembly of OIE delegates.

Despite the implementation of internationally accepted animal identification and traceability system there are however gaps between consumer expectations of what traceability means to them, the intent of regulators and the systems developed by the food industry to deliver traceability.

International organisations in attempting to forge definitions that will withstand a variety of external pressures, are faced with the fundamental obstacle of translating lofty aspirations into market place reality, where balancing what is technologically attainable with what is achievable at a practical level, while not adding unjustified cost to the basic consumer food basket.

Food chain traceability is primarily a risk management tool that is intended to play a part in enhancing food safety and consumer protection, through processes that allow for the tracking of potential risks throughout the food chain, while at the same time tracing the source of the potential risk back to the live animal, to ensure its elimination.

Difficulties in the application of the tool can arise depending on whether the criteria laid down are prescriptive or generic. The European Union General Food Law, establishes the basic principle of traceability being a 'one step forward and one step back' process, which should

allow the benefits of the implementation of OIE standards to be achieved.

Key words: International acceptability – Management tool.
