

CATTLE IDENTIFICATION AND BEEF TRACEABILITY IN JAPAN

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The first case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was detected in Japan in September 2001. Beef consumption in Japan subsequently dropped dramatically because of consumer concerns. The Japanese Government, through the National Livestock Breeding Center (NLBC), quickly introduced a cattle identification and traceability system in order to restore consumer confidence in domestically produced beef. The establishment of the system throughout Japan was challenging, however ear tags bearing ten-character individual identification numbers were successfully attached to all cattle by June 2002. Information on individual cattle from birth to slaughter is reported to NLBC and recorded on linked databases. The system conforms with the elements in Chapter 4.2 of the OIE Terrestrial Code 'Design and implementation of identification systems to achieve animal traceability'.

A feature of the Japanese system is that some of the recorded information regarding cattle is made available to the public via an internet web-site. The individual identification number of cattle from which beef was produced must be shown on the label of packaging, or made available to consumers by the retailer.

The system is used when cattle need to be tracked for disease control purposes. For example, if a BSE infected animal is found, NLBC immediately starts a search to determine the location of cohorts and farms where infected animals have resided. The search is usually finished within a few hours, and is reported to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries enabling cattle of interest to be quickly located. The system has helped restore the trust of consumers in domestically produced beef.

Key words: BSE –Beef traceability and individual cattle identification system –Trust of consumer.
