

DEVELOPING COUNTRY EXPECTATIONS

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The increasingly restrictive rules governing international trade are imposing drastic reforms in the areas of food safety and human and animal health protection. These rules include the ability to trace the progress of a foodstuff from primary producer to final consumer: animal identification and the traceability of animal products are key to this process.

Insufficient human, financial and material resources make it difficult for developing countries, especially those in Africa, to update their regulations to comply with these rules.

Furthermore, in Africa in particular, livestock production systems are mainly of the traditional extensive type, based on highly fragmented production methods and extremely mobile herds, making it complex and costly to implement the required measures for animal identification and the traceability of animal products.

For instance, in some countries of the Sahel, as many as 90% of ruminants are herded in national and cross-border transhumance spanning hundreds of kilometres. The major problem posed by transhumance is the epidemiological risk that it represents and the difficulty in monitoring the progress of herds. For this reason, all the national regulations and bilateral and community agreements of the countries concerned make it compulsory for transhumant livestock producers to carry an international transhumance certificate (CIT). The certificate is designed to facilitate the control of herd movements and contains essential information on the composition of herds (identification of animals by species, sex, age, etc.), all vaccinations administered, the route to be taken by the livestock, the border posts through which the livestock must travel, and their final destination.

The certificate is therefore an essential tool for animal identification and traceability. However, it is being used less and less frequently owing to lack of resources, including for monitoring and evaluation of its impact.

Similarly, apart from in slaughterhouses in large urban centres and modern animal product distribution channels, the traceability of these products remains haphazard.

In a bid to redress this situation, many countries and a number of Regional Economic Communities (REC) have initiated discussions to consider the need to establish systems for the identification and traceability of animals and animal products, based on international standards, particularly those of the OIE and Codex Alimentarius.

In recognition of the need to detect and report epidemiological events, investments in identification and traceability systems should be considered a "Public Good". The international community, especially the OIE, must support this effort, which must necessarily be gradual and should lead to the design of systems best suited to national and regional contexts.

This support should take be undertaken via medium- and long-term commitments and should focus on the following actions:

- I. To conduct feasibility studies

- Evaluation of production, processing and distribution systems for each country or homogeneous geographic area.
- Identification of the principles to be adopted and the tools to be used for identification and traceability.
- Definition of the objectives of the system to be set in place (aims and purposes) and specification of the tool.
- Determination of the scope and extent of use of the identification and traceability system (principle of proportionality to the needs identified, cost/benefit, links with other systems (zoning, compartmentalisation, inspection and certification, etc.))

2. To define an appropriate legal and administrative framework

- Proposal of an institutional and legal platform for managing the system, the procedures to be followed, the public/private partnership, etc.

3. To establish an implementation programme

- To establish a programme for the field of application defined, including the possibility of initiating pilot actions.

Key words: Identification and traceability – OIE standards – Codex standards.
