

Opening remarks to the First OIE International Conference on Animal Identification and Traceability

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On behalf of the European Commission, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the **First OIE International Conference on Animal Identification and Traceability**. The European Union appreciates and supports this initiative of the OIE and thanks the Government of Argentina for kindly hosting this conference. I have no doubt that you will find it informative and beneficial.

Tracing back and tracing forward are well known elements in controlling infectious diseases within countries. Controlling infectious diseases is in turn essential to trade under safe conditions. Therefore, the facilitation of trade of animals and products of animal origin on global markets requires agreement on some common principles relating to identification and traceability.

For this reason I am very thankful that the OIE takes its responsibility as an international standard setting body and is giving priority to this continuous challenge.

Furthermore, the increasing integration between agriculture, food processing and retail chain requires an integrated approach to animal health and food safety.

Fortunately, the technological progress, for example in information technology and radio frequency identification, has provided very efficient tools that are available not only in developed but also in developing countries. Indeed, simple "low tech" methods can already be an important first step toward better traceability.

However, traceability is not cost free and it is often the primary producer whose production costs increase. As a result we have a responsibility to ensure that legislative requirements on identification and traceability are proportionate and cost efficient.

In addition, it is an important incentive for farmers to properly apply "official" identification, if these systems allow as well a "multi-purpose" use on farm as well as in the rest of the production chain.

It is important to develop traceability systems that allow us to serve a broad scope of current and future challenges, going beyond pure animal health uses.

Animal identification and traceability have to be seen more than ever as links between animal husbandry, animal health, food safety and market demands. Technological progress, new animal health challenges and consumer attitudes are driving forces for further developments.

It is the right time for the OIE and the CODEX to take a lead in this process and to promote a way forward at this international conference. There is a great deal of knowledge and expertise among you, the participants of this Conference, and I am sure that we will all greatly benefit from the forthcoming discussions and conclusions.

I thank again the OIE and the Government of Argentina for making this possible and wish you all a good Conference.