

ATTITUDES OF COW-CALF PRODUCERS TOWARD NAIS ARE GUARDED

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Introduction

The introduction of a National Animal Identification System (NAIS) into the United States has generated much confusion and controversy. The goal of the NAIS is to utilize 48-hour traceback in the event of an animal disease outbreak, identify all animals that have had contact with the diseased animal, and link animals to their premises of origin. The NAIS has led to new technology and guidelines with the potential to change the production and marketing landscape of the beef industry. Moreover, these advances have led to public policy issues that have changed the rhetoric of the industry. The objective of this study was to examine perceptions and attitudes of cow-calf producers toward emerging beef technologies and policy issues through a nationwide mail survey. By understanding the demographics of today's producers in addition to their current practices, the industry can work toward better educating and understanding the concerns of these producers.

Experimental Procedures

A panel of experts at Kansas State University completed content validity testing of the prepared survey instrument. Participants were selected in the spring of 2006, from a mailing list of cow-calf producers with more than 100 cows. *BEEF®* Magazine provided the mailing list and a random sample of 1,000 producers was selected. Three mailings were sent to each participant over a two-month time pe-

riod. Non-respondents received a fourth mailing to further encourage response. Mailings included: 1) pre-notice letter, 2) survey packet and cover letter, 3) postcard thank you/reminder, and 4) replacement questionnaire with monetary incentive. Data were collected by Prism Business Media, Inc., and analyzed by both Prism Business Media, Inc. and Kansas State University.

Results and Discussion

A total effective mailing of 972 surveys resulted in 522 responses for an effective response rate of 53.7%. Producers from 41 states responded to the survey, and 77.8% of respondents were over the age of 45 with an average herd size of 160.

The first step in implementing the proposed NAIS is to obtain a premise registration number. Of those surveyed, almost one-third had received a premise ID number (Table 1).

Table 1: Have You Received or Registered Your Operation for a Premise Identification Number?

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting
Yes	171	32.8%
No	341	65.3%
No answer	10	1.9%

N = 522.

Producers were asked to rate their concerns regarding four issues surrounding the implementation of a national ID plan. Liability to producer was the greatest concern of producers. It was followed by cost to the producer, reliability of technology, and confidentiality of information, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Please Rate Your Concerns Regarding the Following Issues Surrounding the Implementation of a National Animal Identification Plan:

(1 = not concerned, 2 = somewhat concerned, 3 = concerned and 4 = very concerned)

	N Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cost to producer	513	3.02	0.976
Confidentiality of information	487	2.94	1.050
Reliability of technology	489	2.95	0.943
Liability to producer	496	3.12	0.965

Participants also evaluated the importance of a national animal identification system. Disease monitoring and regaining foreign markets were the most frequently perceived benefits of a national animal identification system. The majority of producers did not feel such a system was important to increase profitability in their operations (Table 3).

Table 3: How Important Do You Feel a National Animal Identification System is to the Following:

(1 = not important and 6 = critical)

	N Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
Monitoring disease	498	4.13	1.627
Increasing consumer confidence	495	3.95	1.709
Increased profitability	490	3.03	1.674
Regaining foreign markets	493	4.09	1.680
Managing the supply chain	481	3.23	1.711
Enhancing food safety	493	3.71	1.731

Producers were asked to rate their level of agreement with several statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree. Forty-one percent of producers agreed to some degree that the NAIS is necessary. Almost 30% felt the implementation of such a program was overdue. More than 59%, however, felt the implementation timeline was not practical (Table 4).

Table 4: Please Rate the Following Statements About the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) In Order of Agreement:

(1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree)

	N Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
NAIS is necessary	495	3.35	1.683
NAIS implementation timeline is practical	466	2.97	1.492
The implementation of NAIS is overdue	471	2.97	1.723

Respondents also were asked to rate their level of understanding regarding the proposed NAIS, also on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being no understanding and 6 being complete understanding. The majority of producers showed some degree of understanding of the program. Similarly, they were asked to rate their familiarity with electronic ID systems available to producers (Table 5). While most producers felt they were aware of available systems and technology, the margin was small, with a mean of 3.29. The capability of these producers to implement and adopt the NAIS was also evaluated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being incapable and 6 being completely capable. The majority of producers felt they were capable of adopting the program (Table 5).

Table 5: Familiarity With and Capability to Adopt NAIS

(1 = no understanding and 6 = complete understanding)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Familiarity with NAIS	512	3.63	1.302
Familiarity with electronic ID systems	511	3.29	1.419
Capability to adopt NAIS	504	3.87	1.649

Support of a national identification system for cattle was evaluated on a 1 to 6 scale, with 1 being strongly supportive and 6 being strongly opposed. This question showed the most variation within the group, with about 49% supportive and about 48% opposed to some degree. Data showed a mean of 3.53 with a standard deviation of 1.672. Also important to note is the even distribution of producers across all possible responses (Table 6).

Table 6: Generally Speaking, Are You in Favor of a National Identification System for Cattle?

(1 = strongly supportive and 6 = strongly opposed)

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting
1 - Strongly supportive	78	14.9%
2 - Supportive	74	14.2%
3 - Somewhat supportive	106	20.3%
4 - Somewhat opposed	85	16.3%
5 - Opposed	77	14.8%
6 - Strongly opposed	86	16.5%

N = 506. *Mean = 3.53, s.d. = 1.672

Implications

The data ultimately indicates that there is no strong support for or opposition to a national animal ID system. This shows the controversial nature of the issue and a need for further education.