

# Making Animal ID Work

1:30 p.m. panel, Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2005

Presenters: Linda Gilbert, Gilbert Angus Ranch, Buffalo, S.D.; Allen Bright, Antioch, Neb.; and Mark Harmon, Joplin Regional Stockyards, Carthage, Mo.

RAPID CITY, S.D. (Dec. 6, 2005) — In 2003, during the previous Range Beef Cow Symposium, presenters predicted the coming of a national system for individual animal identification (ID). One speaker likened it to a train that had already left the station and was rolling down the track. Two years later, the train is gaining speed, but beef producers still debate whether the industry should get on board or try to derail the locomotive.

During Tuesday afternoon's session, a panel of producers shared their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of a national ID system. Buffalo, S.D., producer Linda Gilbert said she believes many producers still question whether it is really needed, particularly if cattle owners already use hot-iron branding as proof of ownership. She also questioned if it could be implemented practically, and who would pay for it.

"It needs to be of benefit to the industry as well as the consumer. Will it be a profit generator for the industry, or just an added cost?" Gilbert asked. "And who stands the cost — the producer, the feeder or the packer?"

Antioch, Neb., cattleman Allen Bright, who serves as animal ID coordinator for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), said there really are two primary issues of concern. The first is the intent of a national ID system, and the second deals with cost and benefit.



**Nebraska cattleman Allen Bright encouraged attendees to remember national ID is about disease surveillance.** [PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]

Bright urged producers to remember that the proposed National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is not about regulating producers or trying to bolster food safety.

"It's about disease surveillance," Bright stated. "The discovery of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) [in the U.S.] got us in a hurry to establish an identification system, but it's really about having a way to deal with diseases like brucellosis, tuberculosis, anaplasmosis, vesicular stomatitis and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), and a host of diseases that we don't currently have."

Bright said NAIS should provide a means of tracking movement of cattle in the event of a disease outbreak and trace the disease to its source. It is not intended to serve as proof of



**South Dakota rancher Linda Gilbert questioned whether a national ID system is really needed.** [PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]

ownership. It would be a mistake to throw away state brand laws, he added.

“If you wonder who is going to pay for it, just look in the mirror,” Bright said, explaining that much of the estimated \$33 million cost will be borne by beef producers. “But, if it only represents an added cost to us, let’s quit now.”

Producers can choose to make it work to their benefit, he said, alluding to opportunities to use the NAIS to enhance marketing of source- and age-verified cattle. He warned, however, that the program must be developed so it functions with the speed of commerce and does not hinder marketing.

Bright said producers must decide whether NAIS will be driven by the industry or the government.

“We’ll have to work together with our neighbors or it will be taken out of our hands. Then it will be just a cost,” he insisted. “We have to choose to make it work, or let it go.”



**Mark Harmon of Joplin Regional Stockyards, Carthage, Mo., added an additional perspective to the panel.** [PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]

— by Troy Smith, field editor, Angus Productions Inc.  
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