

‘Decoding’ the Alphabet Soup of Animal ID and Marketing Programs

4 p.m. session, Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2005

Presenter: Jack Whittier, Colorado State University

RAPID CITY, S.D. (Dec. 7, 2005) — Jack Whittier, Colorado State University (CSU), helped clarify to attendees of the 2005 Range Beef Cow Symposium some of the “alphabet soup” of government programs related to animal identification (ID) and marketing. Whittier has researched animal ID and cost-reduction techniques for beef producers

It’s crucial for cattle producers to understand these programs, he said, because consumers place their trust in the government. In a survey that asked consumers who they trusted or who they would rely on to certify food-related products, Whittier said, “almost two-to-one, they said the government.”

Of the governmental departments, Whittier noted, “Each has a different mission.” Perhaps the most well-known, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), contains a variety of programs within it. Of those programs, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS); Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS); and Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) are the four Whittier noted as being the most involved in animal ID and marketing.



CSU’s Jack Whittier explained differences among government agencies and programs related to animal ID. [PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]

Two parts of APHIS — Veterinary Services (VS) and Animal Care (AC), he noted, have the most to do with disease surveillance and documenting how animals are cared for, which are fast becoming components of many certification programs. FSIS monitors harvest processes, and the GIPSA Packers and Stockyards Programs (P&S) “assures commerce is done fairly for both sides,” he noted.

Whittier also discussed three major types of programs that he said are changing the beef industry: the USDA Quality Systems Assessment Program (QSA), USDA Process Verified Programs (PVPs) and certified programs.

Using the examples of AngusSourceSM and Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), Whittier detailed the process an entity must go through to be certified or verified by the government. The importance of such programs, he said, is first to show customers a certain level of credibility.

“They (consumers) have trusted USDA, and then we are aligning ourselves and the industry around some of those parameters,” he said.

Secondly, he noted, such programs help capture value.

Whittier closed by providing an optimistic look at the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). “We’re still struggling a little bit as an industry to determine a lot of unanswered questions,” he said. “I think most of the industry has recognized the value of having some safeguards in place, and the marketing opportunities do seem clear.”

— by Brooke Byrd, assistant editor, Angus Productions Inc.
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