



www.USCattleTrace.org

The Next Step for Animal Disease Traceability

While the concept of animal disease traceability is not new, world events like the recent COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need for a viable end-to-end cattle disease traceability system. Recognizing historical concerns about technology, privacy and economic costs in disease traceability efforts, U.S. CattleTrace is working to developing a national infrastructure for animal disease traceability.

U.S. CattleTrace (USCT) is a private, not-for-profit organization that was established in 2018 as CattleTrace, Inc., a Kansas-based disease traceability pilot project. In January 2020, multiple state cattlemen's organizations from major beef producing regions partnered to form U.S. CattleTrace. Led by a 9-member board of directors representing multiple industry sectors and partner states, USCT efforts are focused solely on disease traceability.

"There is a real need for animal disease traceability for the cattle that are destined for our food supply," said Callahan Grund, executive director, U.S. CattleTrace. "As we've worked with the multiple segments of the cattle industry, we've maintained our dedication to move at the speed of commerce and to collect only the necessary data points for a successful traceback."

Producers participating in USCT tag each animal with a Radio Frequency Identification (R.F.I.D.) tag. As cattle pass through comingling points (i.e. auction markets, feedyards and packers) their tag number, otherwise known as their ID, time, date and location of passing are recorded and transferred to the secure USCT database.

"Data privacy is going to be paramount in making this program a success," said Kyler Langvardt, program manager, U.S. CattleTrace. "Because we are a non-profit and own our own database, when an animal disease outbreak would occur, animal health officials would only be able to access specific data after approval from our producer-led board of directors, which keeps the data secure from outside organizations looking to access it."

With producer partners in 12 states, USCT has seen interest from all levels of the industry. The program is seen as extremely valuable to producers like Brandon Depenbusch, vice president of Innovative Livestock Services, Inc., in Great Bend, Kansas, who also serves at the chairman of the U.S. CattleTrace board of directors.

"A disease outbreak would be absolutely devastating to our entire industry," Depenbusch said. "With the program being voluntary and producer-led, we know that we have to listen to producers and take their input very seriously as we develop this infrastructure."



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The economic impact of disease traceability has become more profound with development of international markets. Previous animal disease cases, such as the 2003 case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (known as “mad cow”) was estimated by the U.S. International Trade Commission to have cost the country’s beef industry over \$11 billion dollars in export revenue.

Livestock producers and trade groups are starting to agree that this issue needs tackling, with traceability being a priority in both the 2016-2020 and 2021-2025 Beef Industry Long Plans. The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association also recently adopted policy to support U.S. CattleTrace and its mission of advancing disease traceability in the cattle industry.

“Support from NCBA, individual cattle producers from across the country, and our partners throughout the industry will be paramount to the success of achieving a robust animal disease traceability system in the United States,” Grund said. “As we move forward, it’s more important now than ever to connect with cattle producers and partners to educate about the importance of traceability and gain wide adoption of the infrastructure needed.”

To learn more about U.S. CattleTrace or receive information on how to participate, visit www.uscattletrace.org.

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