USDA unveils goals for animal disease traceability

By Susan Kelly on 9/27/2018

USDA announced four overarching goals for increasing animal disease traceability to protect the long-term health, marketability and economic viability of the U.S. livestock industry.

Greg Ibach, under secretary for USDA’s Marketing and Regulatory Programs, said a comprehensive system is needed for the best protection against a potentially devastating outbreak like foot-and-mouth disease.

“We have a responsibility to these producers and American agriculture as a whole to make animal disease traceability what it should be—a modern system that tracks animals from birth to slaughter using affordable technology that allows USDA to quickly trace sick and exposed animals to stop disease spread,” Ibach said in a statement.

USDA’s four goals for increasing traceability are:

- Advance electronic sharing of data among federal and state animal health officials, veterinarians and industry, including sharing basic animal disease traceability data with the federal animal health events repository (AHER).
- Use electronic ID tags for animals requiring individual identification to make the transmission of data more efficient.
- Enhance the ability to track animals from birth to slaughter through a system that allows tracking data points to be connected.
- Elevate the discussion with states and industry to work toward a system where animal health certificates are electronically transmitted from private veterinarians to state animal health officials.

**Timetable**

USDA will begin implementing the goals in fiscal year 2019. The agency said it will work with states and industry to establish appropriate benchmarks to show progress.

**Electronic tags**

USDA said it will not dictate the use of a specific tag technology. Electronic ID tags will allow animals to move more quickly through ports, markets and sales, and will also help ensure rapid response when a disease event strikes, the agency said. To assist with the transition to electronic ID, USDA said it is ending the free metal tags program and instead offering a cost-share for electronic tags.

The goals stem from a State and Federal Animal Disease Traceability Working Group that developed 14 key points for advancing traceability, USDA said. They also are in line with feedback the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) received at stakeholder meetings held across the country. USDA said it is committed to continued discussion and collaboration to ensure traceability efforts are coordinated across the country.