Producer Information
Florida Cattle Identification Program to Protect Florida’s Cattle Industry; Mitigate Spread of Disease

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Over the last five centuries, Florida’s oldest industry has faced – and endured – its fair share of challenges. In the past, Florida cattle have struggled with animal disease outbreaks, such as Brucellosis and Tuberculosis and those diseases, present in other states, still threaten our cattle today. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) works with Florida’s cattle industry to prevent, diagnose and control serious diseases. Animal identification is important in quickly identifying diseased and exposed animals and is critical in preventing the spread of disease. Individual animal identification will improve the state’s ability to trace livestock in the event of a serious animal disease such as tuberculosis or bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE) and is vital to maintaining markets for Florida cattle. Through the development and implementation of a new Florida Cattle Identification Program, FDACS hopes to protect Florida’s cattle industry from widespread animal disease and strengthen its reputation for high quality products on the national market.

Introduced in March 2013, the Florida Cattle Identification Rule requires that adult cattle and bison moving within Florida must be identified with official, individual tags. FDACS will assist cattle producers in meeting requirements by providing tags at no cost, and information and training related to the new rule. During 2013, FDACS hosted workshops throughout the state to receive producer feedback regarding the rule. Input from stakeholders was included in the provisions of the Rule which was to become effective on February 19, 2014.

During the March 12-13, 2014 Florida Cattlemen’s Association Board of Directors Meeting, the Florida Association of Livestock Markets expressed their desire to amend the rule to allow the option of shifting the responsibility for cattle identification from the seller at a market to the buyer. The Department published the amended Rule on August 15, 2014 with an effective date of September 4, 2014. There will be a 60 day period of continued education and outreach prior to beginning strict enforcement on November 3, 2014. The department will continue outreach and education efforts to assist the industry in meeting the requirements of state, federal and other states’ traceability requirements. Emphasis will be placed on premises registration and tagging of adult cattle on their premises of origin.

The Florida Cattle Identification Rule will not only help to protect the industry from the spread of disease, but it will also assist Florida producers in meeting requirements of the USDA Animal Disease Traceability Rule. The federal rule, which became effective on March 11, 2013, requires livestock, including adult beef cattle and all dairy cattle, with some exceptions, to be officially identified in order to move across state lines.

The following Frequently Asked Questions document was developed to answer the most common questions regarding the Florida Cattle Identification Rule. These questions and answers have been discussed with leading cattle producers in hopes of providing beneficial information to cattle owners and industry partners.
Florida Cattle Identification Rule – Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the purpose of the Florida cattle identification rule?
A. Identification of cattle is critical in confirming disease, identifying animals exposed and preventing disease spread within a herd or between herds. The purpose of this rule is to improve the state’s ability to trace livestock (cattle and bison) in the event of a serious animal disease such as tuberculosis or BSE and is vital in maintaining markets for Florida cattle.

Q. What are the basic parameters of the Florida rule?
A. This rule requires that, unless specifically exempt, adult cattle and bison moving intrastate (within Florida) must have official, individual identification. Exemptions include:
   - animals moving directly to recognized slaughter establishments;
   - animals moving to approved tagging sites to be tagged; and
   - animals moving to another premises, with the same ownership, as part of normal management practices.

Q. What is Animal Disease Traceability?
A. Animal disease traceability is a measurable process of being able to track where diseased and at-risk animals are located and where they have been. Identification of individual animals, using official ID devices, which are specifically assigned and recorded, is critical for traceability. Animal disease traceability does not prevent disease; yet an efficient traceability system helps to reduce the number of animals involved in a disease investigation and the time needed to respond.

Q. What is official identification and why is individual identification of cattle important?
A. An official, individual identification number is a nationally unique number permanently associated with a specific animal utilizing a USDA-provided tag or a purchased tag from a USDA approved source. Tracking of a specific animal is only possible with individual identification and proper record-keeping. State or federal officials will track USDA-provided tags and manufacturers will track tags they distribute. This traceability will aid in identifying other animals that may have been a source of the disease or exposed by an animal found to be diseased. With official identification, an investigation can quickly limit the number of animals involved in a disease investigation and reduce the time needed to respond. This results in more rapid disease control and less impact on affected producers. An effective response to a disease outbreak helps to ensure market access for Florida cattle.

Q. How does this rule benefit cattle producers?
A. The Cattle Identification Rule will benefit producers in several ways. As a result of the rule, accurate traceability information will be more readily available, enabling investigators to shorten investigation timelines, more quickly control the spread of certain diseases, and reduce the number of quarantined and affected animals. These improvements will result in less costly animal disease outbreaks for producers and ensure that interstate markets remain open to Florida cattle.

Q. Why do we need a state rule if there is a similar federal rule in place?
A. The Florida cattle identification rule applies to adult cattle and bison (18 months and older) moving within the state, with some exceptions. Individual identification is important to mitigate the spread of disease within the state. Individual identification will help to reduce the number of animals and the number of owners impacted by a suspected or serious disease occurrence.
Furthermore, the Florida cattle identification rule assists producers in complying with the federal Animal Identification Rule.

**Q. What does the federal regulation on traceability require? What does a producer need to move cattle interstate?**

A. Unless specifically exempted, livestock moved interstate must be officially identified and accompanied by an Interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (ICVI) or approved alternative documents. Cattle moving directly to slaughter or to an approved tagging site are not required to be officially identified prior to movement.

**Q. Under the March 2013 federal rule, does a livestock market have to be an Approved Tagging Site to receive adult cattle that do not have official identification?**

A. A federally approved livestock market can decide whether it will operate as an approved tagging site and apply official ID. Markets should not receive untagged cattle from out-of-state unless they are an approved tagging site or they intend to sell the untagged adult cattle directly to slaughter. The market must be willing and able to designate a slaughter-only class of cattle and ensure that these are only sold to USDA approved slaughter establishments. These cattle will move directly to slaughter on an official backtag applied at the market.

**Q. Under the new federal rule and the draft Florida rule, can a producer consign adult cattle to a USDA approved livestock market and designate them for slaughter only and not have to tag them with official identification tags?**

A. This is possible if the livestock market is willing and able to designate a slaughter-only class of cattle and ensure that these are only sold to USDA approved slaughter establishments. These cattle will move directly to slaughter on an official backtag applied at the market. The approved slaughter establishment will record the backtag identification information.

**Q. Under the Florida rule, can a producer move his/her adult cattle from one pasture to another without official identification?**

A. Yes, cattle remaining under common ownership that are moved from one premises to another as part of normal farm or ranching operations and are exempt from the ID requirements.

**Q. What tags can be used as “Official” identification?**

A. Only “Official Identification Devices” (Tags) can be used as official ID. Official tags are those approved by USDA and tracked in approved database systems. Official tags have unique numbers and are imprinted with the USDA Official Eartag Shield. These tags may be purchased from approved tag manufacturers or metal tags may be provided at no cost by USDA. In addition to “official identification,” other types of tags, marks, and brands may be used for herd management at the discretion of the owner. The USDA website, www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/, provides a listing of approved “official” tags.

**Q. Where can “official” tags be obtained?**

A. Official identification tags, with the USDA seal, can be purchased from any of the approved manufacturers. In addition, Official National Uniform Ear-tagging System (NUES) metal tags are available from USDA at no charge. These tags will be assigned to a specific location (premises) and are currently available from any Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry, District Office.

**Q. Who regulates the “Official” tags (identification devices) and who handles the data?**
A. Official USDA individual identification numbers are administered by USDA, Veterinary Services. This data is stored by USDA and available to state animal health officials when needed for animal disease response. Unique ID numbers assigned to tag manufacturers are recorded in a USDA database and the tag manufacturer is required to keep records on who purchased the ID device(s). NUES metal tags are also tracked in a USDA database and assigned to a state and a specific premises/owner.

Q. Where can cattle be tagged? Who applies tags?
A. Official, individual identification can be applied by the cattle owner, veterinarian, or other person employed or contracted by the owner. Tags can be applied at the owner’s premises or at an approved tagging site, by the approved tagging manager, or a person employed by the tagging site manager.

Q. What is an Approved Tagging Site?
A. An Approved Tagging Site is where animals can be tagged if not tagged on their owner’s premises. Cattle handing facilities including “for hire” pens and auction markets can become an approved tagging site by completing an application and agreement pertaining to individual identification devices and record-keeping.

Q. What about cattle less than 18 months of age?
A. Under the Florida rule, cattle under 18 months of age, are exempt from the official identification requirements for movement within the state of Florida.

Under the federal rule, beef cattle under 18 months of age are exempt from the official identification requirements unless they are moved interstate for shows, exhibitions, rodeos, or recreational events.

Under the federal rule, all dairy animals must be officially identified to move interstate. All rodeo, show and exhibition cattle must be officially identified regardless of age.

Q. What are other states doing?
A. Texas, Alabama and other states have implemented similar state rules. Other states are developing rules relative to cattle identification.

Q. Has there been opportunity for cattle producers and the public to comment on the development of the Florida Cattle Identification Rule?
A. Yes, comments were accepted throughout the rule development process. Interested parties were encouraged to submit comments in writing, in person at workshops and meetings, or by telephone. Rule-making workshops were held across the state to solicit public comments regarding the proposed rule text. FDACS considered all comments that were received during the rule-making process as the final text was developed. A rule-making hearing was held in Tallahassee, Florida prior to the adoption of the final rule. Additional meetings with cattlemen and market operators resulted in amendments to the final rule.

Q. What are the plans for producer education and outreach?
A. Every effort will be made to inform cattle producers and others within the industry. Outreach will include farm/ranch organizations, the University of Florida Extension Service, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and all industry groups. Multiple producer workshops and local meetings have been held throughout the state to discuss the Florida rule. Information has been developed for livestock markets to share with their customers. Information has been published in the Florida Administrative Register and trade journals such as Florida
Q. Was the Cattle ID Rule changed based on comments and input received?

A. Yes, the text of the rule was changed to reflect input that was received during the comment period. The department continued to work closely with the Florida Animal Industry Technical Council’s Subcommittee on Animal Disease Traceability, the Florida Cattlemen’s Association Animal Health and Inspection Committee, livestock market owners, individual producers, and all stakeholders in development of the final rule.

During the March 12-13, 2014 Florida Cattlemen’s Association Board of Directors Meeting, the Florida Association of Livestock Markets expressed their desire to amend the rule to allow the option of shifting the responsibility for cattle identification from the seller at a USDA Approved livestock market to the buyer. The department worked with industry leaders and market owners then published the amended Florida Cattle Identification Rule on August 15, 2014.

Q. Where can additional information be obtained?

A. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry’s website:

The USDA website: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/

FDACS will post information in appropriate media outlets and continue outreach efforts to inform all stakeholders.

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