

New Florida Cattle Identification Program to Protect Florida's Cattle Industry; Mitigate Spread of Disease

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Invites Feedback on Draft Rule

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 within a herd or between herds. It would 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, the draft Cattle Identification Rule would require 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, as well as information and steps to comply with the new rule. During May and June, FDACS will host workshops throughout the state inviting feedback on the draft rule and input from stakeholders will be considered before final adoption of the draft rule in October. The final rule would be effective in January 2014.

The draft 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 new USDA Animal Disease Traceability Rule. The federal rule, effective March 11, 2013, requires livestock, including adult beef cattle and all dairy cattle, with some exceptions, be officially identified in order to move across state lines.

The following Frequently Asked Questions was developed to answer the most common questions regarding the draft 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 development 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 would require 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 acceptable 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 animal disease traceability final rule will benefit producers in several ways. Low levels of official identification in the cattle sector require more herds and cattle—often thousands of animals—to be tested during animal disease investigations than necessary and significantly increase an investigation’s duration. For example, bovine tuberculosis disease investigations frequently exceed 150 days. This means USDA and state investigative teams spend substantially more time and money in conducting tracebacks, potentially resulting in more disease spread. 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. There is an expectation by federal animal health officials as well as our marketing partners in other states that Florida should track animal movement. Without that, a single incident of disease could threaten any of our markets outside the state. A Florida cattle identification rule would apply 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 new federal rule.

Q. What does the federal regulation on traceability require? What do I need to move my animal interstate?

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

Q. Under the new 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 for consignors. Markets should not receive untagged cattle involving interstate movement unless they are an approved tagging site or they intend to sell untagged adult cattle directly to slaughter. This would only be 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 would move directly to slaughter on an official backtag.

Q. Under the new federal rule and the draft Florida rule, could 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 would only be 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 would move directly to slaughter on an official backtag applied at the market. The approved slaughter establishment would record the backtag identification information.

Q. Under the draft Florida rule, could 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 would be exempt from the ID requirements of this proposed rule.

Q. What tags can I use?

A. Only “Official Identification Devices” (Tags) can be used as official ID. Official tags are those approved by USDA and tracked by their manufacturers 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 can be used for

herd management at the discretion of the owner. The USDA website, www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/, provides a listing of approved tags.

Q. Where can I obtain tags?

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 would 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 handling 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 draft Florida rule, cattle under 18 months of age, would be 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 sexually intact dairy animals must be officially identified to move interstate. This exempts steers and spayed heifers born prior to March 11, 2013. All dairy animals born after March 11, 2013 must be officially identified to move interstate.

Q. What are other states doing?

A. Texas and Alabama have recently implemented similar state rules and approximately 10 other states have rules in development relative to cattle identification.

Q. Will there be an opportunity for cattle producers and the public to comment on the proposed Florida Cattle Identification Rule?

A. Yes, comments will be accepted throughout the rule development process. Interested parties can submit comments in writing, in person at workshops and meetings, or by telephone. FDACS will consider all comments that are received during the rule-making process.

Q. Will there be any scheduled meetings or workshops to allow for public input, discussions, and questions?

A. During April 2013, FDACS will schedule and announce several rule-making workshops to solicit public comments regarding the proposed rule text. Additional information is included in the timeline below. Workshops will be noticed in the *Florida Administrative Register* and the dates and times will be published in industry publications and trade journals. In addition, Department staff will be available to participate in producer meetings at local and state levels.

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. Information will be developed for livestock markets to share with their customers. Information will be published in the *Florida Administrative Register* and trade journals such as *Florida Agriculture* and the *Florida Cattleman and Livestock Journal*. Information will be posted on the Division of Animal Industry's website: <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/ai/>.

Q. Can the rule be changed based on comments and input received?

A. Yes, the preliminary text of any draft rule can be changed based on input received. FDACS will continue 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.

Q. What is the timeline for implementation of this rule?

A. Proposed Rule-making Timeline:

- March 15, 2013 – Published Notice of Rule Development in the *Florida Administrative Register (FAR)*
- April 2013 – Publish announcements of the following rule workshops in the *FAR*
 - May 16, 2013 7:00 - 10:00 pm
 - Florida Farm Bureau Headquarters
 - 5900 SW 34th Street
 - Gainesville, Florida 32608
 - June 4, 2013 6:30 - 9:30 pm
 - Jackson County IFAS, Extension Service
 - 2741 Pennsylvania Ave
 - Marianna, Florida 32448

- June 11, 2013 7:00 - 10:00 pm
 - Highlands County IFAS, Extension Service
 - Bert J. Harris, Jr. Agricultural Center
 - 4505 George Blvd.
 - Sebring, Florida 33875
 - June 18, 2013 2:30 – 5:00 pm
 - Florida Cattlemen’s Convention
 - Marriott Hotel
 - 800 Collier Boulevard
 - Marco Island, Florida 34145
- August 2013 – Publish Notice of Proposed Rule
 - The notice will contain a provision stating the proposed rule will take effect on January 1, 2014.
 - The proposed rule text will be published in the *Florida Cattleman and Livestock Journal* and other industry publications.
 - The public will be able to request a hearing and/or submit written comments. The Joint Administrative Procedures Committee (JAPC) will also review the proposed rule and provide comments.
 - August to December, 2013 – Review of input and final revisions to proposed rule
 - December 2013 – File Final Rule
 - January 1, 2014 – Final Rule to take effect.

Q. Where can I obtain additional information?

A. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry’s website: <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/ai/>.

The *Florida Administrative Register*:
http://www.FLRules.org/gateway/View_Notice.asp?id=12764247.

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

FDACS will post information in appropriate media outlets and implement an outreach plan to inform all stakeholders.

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