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Strengthening Small Ruminant Producers' Enterprises Using the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

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Abstract: Extension professionals can assist potential producers, current producers raising goats and sheep, and those who are expanding their enterprises to understand, participate in, and reap the benefits of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). Extension professionals can help these small ruminant producers manage tradeoffs between risk and reward of NAIS that will affect production and marketing of animal-derived foods. Working with Extension professionals and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, these producers can meet the USDA recommendations for the NAIS and enhance their ability to meet consumers' demand for high-quality animal-derived foods while expanding and strengthening their enterprises.

Introduction

Extension professionals have worked with agricultural producers using models and planning tools to manage tradeoffs between risk and reward to increase farm profitability (Holcomb, & Muske, G, 2000; Barnes, Meche, Hatch, & Dixon, 2009). USDA officials and Extension professionals should work together to help producers understand that the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is a modern, streamlined information system that helps producers and animal health officials respond quickly and effectively to animal disease events (USDA APHIS, 2009) to reduce potential adverse impacts.

Extension professionals can assist potential producers, producers who are presently raising goats and sheep and those who are thinking of expanding their enterprises to understand, participate in, and reap the benefits of the NAIS that will enhance their ability to meet consumers' demand for high-quality animal-derived foods and products (Madden, 2010).

Which Identification System Should Be Used?

Extension professionals and USDA officials can help small ruminant producers with information that will enable them to choose the most appropriate of two identification systems in the NAIS (USDA APHIS, 2009) for their animals (Barnes, Meche, Hatch, & Dixon, 2009).

Individual Identification

Producers who prefer to identify animals individually can choose the Individual Identification system. Visual-only eartags, radio- frequency identification (RFID) eartags, and injectable transponders are among the 840 devices with a standardized 15-digit numbering system recommended by the USDA for official animal identification (USDA APHIS, 2009).

Group/Lot Identification

Producers with animals raised and moved as a group should use the Group/Lot Identification system with a 15-character number consisting of a seven-character PIN; the date that the group or lot of animals was assembled; and a 2-digit number which represents the number of animals in the groups assembled at the same premises on the same day (USDA APHIS, 2009).

What Are the Main Reasons and Benefits of an Animal Identification System?

Extension professionals can play an important role in helping producers understand the following reasons and benefits that can be derived from having an animal identification system.

(1) Protection of Premises and Livelihoods

Participation of producers in NAIS is voluntary, which means that they will be notified quickly when a disease outbreak or other animal health event might put their animals at risk. A disease outbreak or other animal health event can be contained more quickly and more effectively if information is available, timely, and accurate (USDA APHIS, 2009).

(2) Reduction of Hardships Caused by a Disease Outbreak or Other Animal Health Event

Rapid response to a disease outbreak or other animal health event will result in fewer producers affected, less hardship, and reduced loss of irreplaceable breeding stock and bloodlines, as well as fewer animals in distress, reduced losses resulting from the diseases and eradication efforts, and reduced economic strain on communities (USDA APHIS, 2009).

(3) Protection of Access to Markets

Producers' participation in NAIS helps to preserve the marketability of their animals, maintain and protect prices for domestic commodities, and keep crucial international markets open. The greater the participation of goat and sheep producers, the greater their marketing opportunities, ensuring competitiveness in domestic and international trade (USDA APHIS, 2009).

(4) Individuals' Private Information

Individuals' private information will be protected by the USDA, and Federal law protects individuals' private information and confidential business information from disclosure. The USDA will maintain only limited premises registration and access to animal movement, and location records will be requested by Animal

health officials only in the case of an animal disease event (USDA APHIS, 2009).

(5) Participation in the NAIS Program

It is the choice of individual states to keep producers' participation in NAIS voluntary or not. The USDA believes that the best approach to NAIS is a voluntary system driven by the states and the private sector (USDA APHIS, 2009).

(6) The NAIS Program

The NAIS is a voluntary partnership program designed by the states, industry, producers, and USDA. Producers' participation and input are critical to ensure that NAIS makes sense (USDA APHIS, 2009) and at the same time help producers meet the challenges in the livestock industry. Extension professionals should be able to provide producers with relevant information to assist them in making the decision on the benefits of participation in the program (Holcomb, & Muske, 2000; Barnes, Meche, Hatch, & Dixon, 2009).

What Costs Are Associated with NAIS?

The NAIS is designed for the costs to be shared by industry and government and to minimize industry's share (USDA APHIS, 2004). Extension professionals can work with small ruminant producers to manage tradeoffs between risk and reward using a cost-benefit analysis of NAIS for each operation (Holcomb, & Muske, 2000; Barnes, Meche, Hatch, & Dixon, 2009).

Tags and Tagging Costs

NAIS costs include cost of the tag; cost of tag applicator and/or application service; labor costs; chute costs; shrink (weight-loss); potential injury to the animal during tagging; and potential injury to people during tagging (APHIS Veterinary Services, 2009).

Reading Costs

Reading costs include those for visual tags, recording the identification number, additional time spent in a chute for reading, potential injury to animal during reading; potential injury to people during reading, data accumulation (computer, software), database storage, Internet access, and printing (for labels where group/lot identification is utilized) (APHIS Veterinary Services, 2009).

Premises Registration Costs

The costs of an individual's management time, mileage; paperwork needed to register his or her premises (registration itself is free); and updating his or her own premises information (APHIS Veterinary Services, 2009) should be included.

Conclusion

The ability of Extension professionals to assist small ruminant producers to meet the USDA recommendations for the NAIS will have long-term positive effects that will allow them to reap the benefits of the NAIS. Small ruminant producers' ability to manage tradeoffs between risk and reward of NAIS will affect their ability to have an impact on production and marketing of animal-derived foods as they address

consumers' demand for high quality animal-derived foods and maintain, expand, and strengthen their enterprises.

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