Electronic Identification Boluses May Aid National Animal Identification System

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Electronic identification boluses may be implemented in the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) and ease a financial burden on U.S. farmers and ranchers.

Boluses administered and retained in the forestomach of livestock animals can carry and transmit electronic identification information, according to September 2006 research from the University of Madrid.

“This technology has created a reliable electronic identification carrier,” said lead researcher J.J. Ghirardi. “Traditional electronic identification ear tagging methods fall off or fail 11 percent of the time. Our research has shown that the electronic identification boluses are retained 100 percent of the time.”

A bolus, traditionally used for administering medicine, can be manipulated to contain radio frequency identification (RFID). The new bolus is weighted and made of plastic or ceramic to restrict it to the forestomach of the identified animal. Ghirardi said the electronic identification bolus does not affect market performance, harm the stomach or cause discomfort to the animal.

The electronic identification bolus may be implemented in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Animal Identification System (NAIS), an effort to register every animal and premise in the country. NAIS became a priority after the mad cow disease outbreak in 2003.

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The program will allow complete traceback of a diseased animal’s movement and origination herd within 48 hours of identification.

“NAIS is an expensive program that has heavily weighted the Farm Bill and also may place some additional costs on our ranchers,” said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer.

“The bolus could be a relatively inexpensive identification method that would reduce the financial burden placed on livestock producers.”

Allflex USA and Nedap retail the electronic identification bolus. Producers interested in identifying their livestock with the bolus should contact their state department of agriculture.

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