

Traceability: Where Are We Now?

Panelists explain their views of national traceability system.

by **KASEY MILLER,**
associate editor

The USDA announced a nationwide animal identification system for disease traceability on Dec. 20, 2012 (see page 80). Published in the *Federal Register* Jan. 9, the

final rule will take effect 60 days later, March 11.

Where does that put the beef industry? A panel consisting of Mark Gustafson, JBS;

Rick Scott, AgriBeef; and John Butler, Beef Marketing Group, addressed that question at the International Livestock Congress—USA 2013 (ILC) in conjunction with the National Western Stock Show in Denver Jan 15. Leann Saunders, Where Food Comes From Inc., moderated the panel.

Saunders explained that traceability is the ability to track animal movements, but there are three major differences in systems:

- breadth, or amount of information collected;
- depth, how far back tracking is available through the system; and
- precision, how accurate the information is.

Within the last 20 years, animal traceability has been an issue, and while most in the industry agree that it's needed,

“Can we as an industry afford to allow states to create 50 different systems?”

— *Rick Scott*

the question of who manages the system and who pays for it was the biggest obstacle. Historically, Saunders said, it has been market-driven for branding initiatives. To access the Japanese market, beef had to have been traceable.

Gustafson said another catalyst would be a disease outbreak, which was actually the cause for the market-driven traceability programs, since Japan closed its borders to U.S. beef because of the confirmed case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in 2003. However, he said, the industry gets complacent about traceability when disease is not prevalent.

The panelists agreed that the federal animal disease traceability system is a good start, but there are many holes. Scott noted that, in the current system, each state develops its own system.



From left, Mark Gustafson of JBS, Rick Scott of AgriBeef and John Butler of the Beef Marketing Group agreed that the federal animal disease



Traceability systems differ in their breadth, depth and precision, explained Leann Saunders, moderator of the traceability panel.

“Can we as an industry afford to allow states to create 50 different systems?” he asked.

Butler added that we don’t have a system that holds the industry as a whole accountable to a profit and loss. Segments are accountable, but not each industry, he said, adding that responsibility and accountability are lax in the industry as a whole.

“Our chance of success is going to be private,” Butler predicted, offering traceability systems for Tyson’s Farm Check, Progressive Beef and Whole Foods as good examples of private programs.

Overall, the panelists agreed that animal disease traceability is necessary and the current system is a good start, but needs much improvement.



Editor’s Note: *The Angus Journal’s online coverage of ILC 2013 is available in the Virtual Library (www.api-virtuallibrary.com). Select “Other Industry Meetings” option in the Meeting Sites pull-down menu, then choose the “News Coverage” submenu option.*



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