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# Agriculture & Food News

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## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY HELPS NATIONAL ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

Salt Lake City, -- Utah's livestock industry is taking advantage of digital computer technology to increase food safety and prevent the spread of animal diseases. The same type of technology used at retail stores to prevent theft is being used on the farm to keep track of livestock such as cattle, sheep, elk, and horses. Electronic tags the size a quarter are being attached to livestock. When the animals walk past an electronic reader panel (similar to those at entrances to retail stores) an electronic signal is sent to a nearby laptop computer. The computer tracks and counts the number of animals that pass by the panel. The electronic tag stays on the animal for life. It is similar to a social security number. Wherever the animal is sold or moved, a digital record of that transaction can be kept.

A national database system is being created that will help veterinarians locate and remove diseased animals. This National Animal Identification System (NAIS) will help prevent suspect animals from entering the food supply and keep food safe for consumers. It also assure foreign countries that U.S. beef, and other meat products, is safe to consume.

Utah is a leader in the number of ranchers who are participating in the program. A total of 8,080 ranches, or roughly 64% of Utah ranchers, have registered their location with the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF). The UDAF is administering the program locally, and the department is hoping that all ranchers will join in within the next few years.

Had this system been in place in 2003 when a single cow in Washington was diagnosed with BSE, (mad

cow), it would have taken an estimated 48 hours to find all the animals that came in contact with that diseased animal, instead of the four-months that it took investigators to locate the animals.

Locating suspect animals quickly can prevent them from entering the food system.

Read more about the NAIS program at: <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>

**VIDEO-TAPE** of the Utah system and comments from program managers are available from Utah Department of Agriculture and Food. (examples of images on video)



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