THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF INDIVIDUAL LIVESTOCK IDENTIFICATION IN MEXICO

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Introduction

The economic and social impact, which the recent disease outbreaks have had on the world meat market, manifests the need of having an effective system of identification and traceability, that make it possible to trace the live animals and their derivates. At present, many countries are adopting livestock identification systems. In the United States of America (USA), the adoption of these systems has been voluntary until now, but it will be obligatory after January of 2009. Mexico is an important supplier of livestock to the USA, who has fixed new regulations for the importation of livestock, which will be applied starting in 2007. This will cause difficulties in the commercial exchange of animals that do not fulfil these requirements.

The objective of the National System of Individual Livestock Identification (SINIIGA) is to establish an identification system for cattle, which is individual and permanent, to facilitate actions of productive registration, animal health, control of mobilization and tracing for a food safety plan, as well providing a means for controlling cattle theft.

SINIIGA was an initiative of the Mexican government, directed toward preparing the Mexican cattle industry to face the new and changing commercial environment under more competitive conditions, keeping in mind the potential impact of this system on the health and confidence of the consumer. SINIIGA was implemented as a component of the Stimulus Program for Livestock Productivity (PROGAN). In order to receive the subsidy, the beneficiaries of this Program were required to implement the SINIIGA.

SINIIGA includes two components: a physical aspect consisting of two ear tags and an identification card, and the second consists of a national and regional data base. The physical component is provided free of charge for the dams that are subsidized by PROGAN. The producers must cover the cost of identifying the cattle that are not registered in the Program. In its initial stage, the target population of the SINIIGA were the beneficiaries of PROGAN. The cattle producers that were not beneficiaries of this Program can register to the system voluntarily. In the second stage, the cattle not subsidized by PROGAN will be identified.

In the initial stage, the ear tags were applied free of charge, be certified technicians, for the producers with herds of under 30 dams. The ear tags were provided to the rest of the producers, who received the necessary instructions for their application. In the initial stage, 74 per cent of the subsidized cattle should be tagged, covering 62 per cent of the Cattle Production Units (UPP). The rest of the UPP and of the cattle was programmed.

Matherials and methods

This analysis was carried out to measure the results obtained by the SINIIGA, making emphasis on quality of implementation, effectiveness of the ear tagging process and measurement of the degree of achievement in the goals planned for the period 2003-2006. Based on the data from this analysis, arguments would be generated for deciding on its continuity.

The analysis was made in 2006. The information for the quantitative analysis was taken from a probabilistic sample of 1,033 beneficiaries and a representative sample of 39 SINIIGA technicians. To obtain the qualitative information, case studies were conducted in six states; Chiapas, Veracruz, Tamaulipas, Sonora, Chihuahua and Tabasco, in which diverse functionaries responsible for the operation of the system were interviewed, along with leaders and technical personnel of the cattle producers organizations. Other sources of information were: official documents related to the System, reports of achievement of physical and financial goals and the official data base of beneficiaries.

Results and Discusión

To carry out the execution of the SINIIGA, the Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Pesca y Alimentación (SAGARPA) drew up a plan with the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Ganaderas (CNOG) so that the latter could implement the program. The decision favored the advancement of the System due to the contract that this organization has with its affiliated producers. For this purpose, the CNOG created an operative structure that included the installation of a National Operation Center (CON), 42 Regional Operation Centers (COR) and 52 Local Operation Centers (COL).

In the first phase of the SINIIGA, an identification system was installed in 5,775,897 dams in reproductive age that were subsidized by PROGAN, located in 203,761 UPP. For this purpose, SINIIGA had a total budget of 279.5 million Mexican pesos (25,478,578 US dollars). The coverage of goals, in terms of UPP, is one hundred per cent for the first stage and 22 per cent for the second. The advancement in the capture of information of the cards is just 27.5 per cent, mainly because of the difficulty of the system, among other factors.

In some states, it was decided that the SINIIGA technicians would apply all of the ear tags, regardless of the scale of the UPP. This decision was correct, as it insures the placement of all the ear tags, which does not occur in the states where the tags were given to the producers (over 30 dams), who were to do the tagging themselves.

The producers, and even the functionaries of some institutions that support the sector, are still not convinced of the usefulness of the identification system; and therefore they continue to use other systems with specific objectives, such as animal health campaigns and exportation. In addition, in the opinion of those that were interviewed, the identification system is costly, as its price is higher than the tags that are used in the market, which puts at risk the identification of the cattle that are not subsidized by PROGAN. In general, the producers see the implementation of the system as just another requirement to continue receiving the cash payment given by PROGAN.

The advancements achieved up to this point lay the groundwork for the system to pass on to the following stages, in which the rest of the cattle existing in the UPP will be identified. At the same time, the current legislation is being adopted, so that the implementation of this identification system will be obligatory, and recognized as the official system of traceability of animal products along the commercial chain.

The decision to implement the system is now seen as being very valuable for the development of the national livestock industry. In the future, the real success of SINIIGA should be measured by the number of animals that will be tagged without the subsidy of PROGAN. At present there are few requests for tags for the rest of the existing cattle in the UPP subsidized by PROGAN and for cattle breeders outside of the Program.

Conclusions

If SINIIGA is not continued, the substantial resources invested in this attempt will be lost, and in particular the time that will be lost by the national cattle industry to place itself at the level of the most competitive. Without a doubt, in a very short time, an effort will have to be made to establish a similar identification system, if the industry is to remain in the national and international market of animal products.

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