

LITS SA:

A Journey

- ▶ WILLIE CLACK, Co-Chairperson Lits-SA,
WClack@unisa.ac.za



The Red Meat Industry comprising the whole value chain in the 2010s identified the need for a fully functional national animal identification and traceability system built through industry and government partnerships. The vision was a system which meets the needs of a diverse (Communal, smallholders, large farms, studs, etc.) livestock sector and contributes towards its growth. The goal is to establish a voluntary system enhancing a national compulsory animal identification and traceability system. Furthermore, the system must have the capacity to improve the ability to protect animal health, support swift containment of serious animal diseases, address food safety issues, and enhance the livestock sector's competitiveness and ability to retain or capture local and global market opportunities.

The Red Meat industry was never in doubt that enhanced animal disease traceability is the main driver for establishing LITS-SA (Livestock Identification and Traceability System in South Africa), reducing disruption of marketing activities and export certification following FMD outbreaks, and supporting DALRRD and provinces better-managing biosecurity of the FMD-free zone, thus safeguarding access to export markets for livestock and livestock products. The current outbreak of FMD in 2019 negatively impacts a typical example

of what was supposed to be prevented – instead, the industry is edging into the abyss.

On a secondary level, the red meat industry envisaged that national animal identification and traceability system would meet animal disease traceability requirements and support improving genetic selection programmes and on-farm management, growing livestock value chain opportunities through integrity assurance schemes, deterring stock theft and providing easy access to information to help to resolve stock theft cases, development of finance and insurance products for animal agriculture, and improving other industrial processes including supply chain management.

Government and industry stakeholders consulted over the years and developed a database with the CSIR. The databases are a complete product utilised within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DALRRD) to manage Foot and mouth Disease (FMD) in various provinces as a pilot project before implementation within the industry. The database has a variety of utilities, such as the registration of animal owners, auctioneers, feedlots, abattoirs etc. The most significant feature is the control over the movement of animals and the issuing of all

required legislated documentation. The system can be used on and offline with a computer or cell phone. With so many years of input from various role players and the vision of the late Dr Michel Bradfield (LRF), the entire menu is catered.

Implementation is currently the biggest issue with the LITS-SA system. Although it is fully functional, the committee hit a brick wall, and before not breaking down the wall, the system will not be rolled out. The wall is a legislative problem within the current Animal Identification Act 96 of 2002). The challenge is enshrined in the definition of an identification mark reading as follows:

“identification mark” means any registered mark registered in terms of section 5(2) and placed on any animal for any purpose and includes any representation of a mark intended to be placed on any animal, as the circumstances may require. But does not include any-(c) clasp, rivet or tag attached to the ear. or any mark made on such clasp, rivet or”The content of paragraph (c) is a prohibiting clause meaning that no tag, whether

RFID, HFID, BAR Coded tag or plain plastic, may be used to identify. The whole industry is at ransom as companies sell systems at a high cost to producers; feedlot developed its traceability systems based on the ear tag principle to identify individual animals.

Various hula hoop exercises have been done over the past couple of months, seeking an escape route from the definition in the Animal Identification Act as the most significant agricultural industry is held at ransom without success. Currently, the biggest challenge is to move on to either the revision of the current act or a new act without being able to set a timeline, as this is a tedious process.

Sometimes on a sarcastic note, you sit back and realise – “we are going back into the future.”When communicating again, may we be able to give you the good news?

May your beautiful red cattle graze in prosperity

Red Meat greetings