

USDA APHIS Repeals January 1, 2023, RFID Mandate



A mandate previously announced by the APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) division of the USDA requiring certain cattle and bison that cross state lines to be tagged with an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) ear tag, has been revoked and is no longer set to take effect. This announcement was made on March 23rd, 2021, by the USDA.

The mandate would have applied to mature breeding stock above the age of 18 months being transported across state lines as well as rodeo stock, show animals, and exhibition animals that are transported across state lines. The USDA currently requires these animals to be tagged with metal tags certified by the USDA as a part of their ADT (Animal Disease Traceability) program and accompanied by an Interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (ICVI).

“The animal disease traceability (ADT) regulations for cattle apply only to sexually intact beef animals over 18 months of age moving in interstate commerce, cattle used for exhibition, rodeo and recreational events, and all dairy cattle. The regulations permit brands and tattoos as acceptable identification if the shipping and receiving States agree and group/lot identification when a group/lot identification number (GIN) may be used” (USDA APHIS, 2021).

Due to strong opposition during the public comment period in July of 2020, APHIS revoked the mandate in 2021. APHIS originally assembled an advisory committee to research and implement the RFID mandate. R-Calf USA (Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America) filed a lawsuit against APHIS in 2019 stating that APHIS’ advisory committee was unlawful and comprised of biased individuals and industry representatives poised to profit from the new mandate. APHIS announced that it will comply with the rulemaking process for any future action related to RFID requirements.

APHIS still lists the “Use electronic identification tags for animals requiring individual identification in order to make the transmission of data more efficient” as one of the four overarching goals of the ADT program. No further comments have been made regarding the progress of a future RFID mandate since the March 2021 update halting the implementation of the proposed program changes.

Current Arkansas Farm Bureau policy regarding national animal identification traceability efforts reads “We Support ... Maintaining the option for management of the animal I.D. system through non-governmental entities and the prospects of developing other services utilizing I.D. information.”