

Livestock identification advantageous for all role-players

In order align Namibia with European market requirements the Farm Assured Namibian Meat (FAN Meat) Scheme is currently implementing an ear-tag identification system for livestock. This will occur by linking computerised codes to commercial branding. The aim is to improve stock traceability; where stock offered for sale or for slaughter at abattoirs will be tagged to correspond with the latest brand mark.

The brand, as in the past, will identify ownership, whilst the ear-tag will indicate the marketing of the animal. Although the ear-tag will not be legally enforceable during the phasing-in stage of the system, a compulsory provision for ear-tags may be legislated in the future. The brand, which must be legible, remains a legal requirement on all cattle.

Agra has agreed to act as distributor of the ear-tags on behalf of the Meat Board which will administer the FAN Meat Scheme. The necessary order form book for ear-tags will be available at Agra branches from early 2003 to enable producers to order their required tags. Agra, in co-operation with the Meat Board, will handle the order until it is ready for collection at the order point. Agra claims the money on behalf of the Meat Board and merely pays it over without any profit motive. Cattle ear-tags will sell at N\$ 7.00 per tag.

Namibia's Animal Branding Act stipulates that all stock owners, within certain areas as determined by the Minister of Agriculture, must brand their cattle with symbols issued by the Registrar of Brand Symbols. Symbols are determined by district, with the first letter of the brand identifying the district and the remaining symbols identifying the stock owner. Animals must be branded at a predetermined age and upon change of ownership with the mark of the new owner. Legislation provides a stud stock exemption to the abovementioned branding requirements. Stud stock must, however, be registered in a stud register which allocates stud identification symbols. The Registrar keeps a record of these identifications symbols from the stud register. This exemption is made for stud animals only. Although the Registrar retains the right to decide which marks animals may bear, thus far stud breeders were allowed to identify their animals according to the rules of the various stud breeder associations without Registrar intervention.

The fact remains that stud animals offered for sale at commercial auctions, or to abattoirs for slaughter, can no longer be regarded as stud animals. In such cases the animals must bear the normal commercial brand. To meet the European requirement of traceability, such animals will have to be ear-tagged with the visual electronic code as determined by the FAN meat Scheme.

Stud breeders must be aware that the stud registration mark cannot, and may not, be used as a commercial brand. The registration of stud stock occurs at the Namibian Stud Breeders Association, while the registration of commercial brands is done by the Meat Board of Namibia. Although acceptable stud brands can indeed be registered as commercial brands at the Meat Board, this is not an automatic process but one that the breeder must apply for.

This system will undoubtedly require further input from producers, abattoirs and processors. FAN Meat is however the system which must be implemented to allow Namibia access to a larger playing field.

With regard to small stock, it appears that South Africa will retain the system of tattooing and that the implementation of ear-tags will be postponed until general clarity regarding tattooing is received. Producers are advised that the South African requirement for the import of Namibian small stock remains tattooing, an aspect which has not received adequate attention in the past. Namibia can be assured that South Africa will enforce stricter tattooing controls and measures at and within its borders.

The FAN Meat Scheme is the future for meat producers. All role-players in the Namibian meat industry will need to co-operate to optimise it for Namibia and access the best possible markets. Although FAN Meat ear-tagging is not compulsory at this stage, producers should regard it as the phasing-in of a system that may well be legislated as compulsory by 2004.