

Premises identification – a traceability cornerstone to success

Premises identification (PID) is a relatively new development in Canadian agriculture, but it has already been used to minimize the impact of emergencies and animal health threats.

Simply put, premises identification provides greater geographic precision to the places where livestock are raised or handled. A unique number, individually administered by the provinces and territories, is assigned to specific land parcels such as farms, pastures, feedlots, auction marts and abattoirs, to name a few examples. Once information is validated and a PID is assigned, the land location information is entered into a database, which can only be accessed by authorized people for specific situations, such as an animal health emergency.

Brad Andres, director of emergency programs for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, says premises identification can be a lifesaver – literally.

“We’ve had two examples of when premises identification really shined – one would be the Slave Lake fire in 2011, and the other was a pipeline break on the Red Deer River in 2012,” he said. “We used the information in premises identification to highlight the at-risk farms as the fire moved downwind. We drew a circle around where we thought the fire could spread, and the affected producers were contacted so they could prepare for the emergency.”

Premises identification was instrumental in 2014 by limiting the spread of an Avian Influenza outbreak in British Columbia. PID was implemented in the province after a previous outbreak 10 years earlier, and it made a tremendous difference in managing the threat.

“Having the information there, up-to-date and accurate meant that business could continue because there was that trust and knowledge in place – we knew where the animals were, we knew the processing schedule, and we knew all the farms in the infected zone. The difference between 2004 and just 10 years later was night and day,” said Dr. Jane Pritchard, chief veterinary officer in British Columbia.

For premises identification to be effective, all land owners or operators with livestock and poultry must add their premises to the database by providing a geographical location as well as emergency contact information. The provinces

and territories are charged with administering the numbers in order to verify the location information provided is correct. Once a number is assigned to a piece of land, that number remains affixed to that location and never changes, even if the land is sold. The provinces and territories adhere to national standards to ensure the data works within the national traceability program.

“Now when we have a train wreck, a truck rollover, a pipeline break, a wildfire or a flood, we can find out how many farms are affected and if they need to be notified. We have their contact information – as long as they have updated information for their registered premises,” said Andres.

Premises identification is quick and easy to obtain, usually taking less than five to 10 minutes. Producers can ensure it remains an effective tool by updating their information should it ever change.

In conjunction with animal identification and animal movement reporting, premises identification completes the three pillars of Canada’s national traceability system. Having a functional livestock traceability system supports and strengthens the entire food supply chain in Canada – and abroad. Foreign markets often want reassurances that their international trading partners have a robust traceability system for quickly identifying health threats and limiting their spread.

“It allows us to get out in front of a threat and be proactive,” says Dr. Gerald Hauer, chief provincial veterinarian for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “There are other ways to get that information, but a lot of times, that means driving door-to-door, and in these types of situations, time is of the essence. Having it all in an accurate database is hugely beneficial.”

For more information on premises identification and traceability in Canada, including how to obtain a PID in your province or territory, please visit www.tracecanada.ca.