

Representatives from national and provincial organizations and breed groups gathered in Calgary on June 7 to share ideas, present issues and discuss solutions for the equine ID system that has become inevitable for our industry. The conference was presented by the Horse Industry Association of Alberta with funding through the provincial and federal governments' Growing Forward program.

The morning session was opened by a representative from our national governing body, Equine Canada. The Chair of EC's Equine ID Committee, Ed Kendall, presented their CanEQUID program, the equine node of the Canadian Livestock Traceability System. Through this system, each Canadian equine will receive a lifetime 9-digit code. This number will be connected to information such as animal name, pedigree, registration number, a Coggins-style description of the horse and any micro-chip, tattoo or brand information. The 9-digit code will also track movement and horse health. Equine Canada is currently testing the data collection methods to determine the viability of the system for the industry.

The attending breed groups presented information on their registration process and ID systems. Many had similar requirements, including detailed descriptions, DNA testing for breeding stock and, in some cases, micro-chipping. All groups expressed concern about any additional costs or complexity that would be associated with a national ID system for horses as some breeders and owners already opt out of registration and transfer processes due to cost. Breed groups also expressed concern about the longevity of electronic technology, feeling that any solution needs to be a long-term, multi-generational product. The provincial equine organizations from Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Alberta were in attendance. A priority for these groups is creating a system that will work for the large number of recreational horse owners in their membership base, and assist these owners in protecting their animals from disease.

The afternoon session was presented by Mark Pydynowski and Bob Van Schoick of Somark Innovations. Somark has developed a ceramic based ink that reflects radio waves and can therefore be used in identification tattoos for livestock. The tattoo would be like a two-dimensional bar code applied anywhere on the horse, through the hair, not visible, and could be scanned and read from a distance of 4'. The technology is very new and not yet fully developed or tested on horses but presents a promising alternative to other forms of electronic ID currently available.