

Camelid ID Working Group Status Report, August 2006

Accomplishments

The Camelid ID Working Group (CWG) was established early in 2004 with 24 initial members representing the major camelid associations and interest groups. Since the CWG's initial status report was presented to The NAIS Subcommittee of the Secretary's Advisory on Foreign Animal and Poultry Diseases in September of 2004, the CWG can report the following accomplishments:

A web site, www.camelidid.org, was established in July of 2005 to provide camelid owners with information on the NAIS, how it may affect them and what camelid identification recommendations will be proposed to the USDA. It also includes a generic PowerPoint presentation on the NAIS that can be customized for use by any camelid species organization. The web site serves as a repository for the history of the development of a camelid identification final plan and also provides background information on animal identification and links to other information resources.

An online survey, to determine industry preferences for specific methods and locations of permanent camelid identification and for management and financing of an animal tracking database, was conducted on the CWG website from February 7 and March 11, 2006. Complete results of this survey can be viewed on: <http://www.camelidid.org/surveys.html>.

Synopsis:

- Camelid herd size of respondents was small. 38% of respondents own 1-10 animals; 30% of respondents own 11-20 animals and 24% own 21-50.
- 67.5% of respondents indicated at least one camelid they owned had an implanted microchip
- 61% of microchips are implanted at the base of an ear, with 51% at the base of the left ear.
- 93% of respondents indicated they prefer implanted microchips as the method of permanent identification to be used in camelids for participation in the NAIS.
- There was no clear opinion regarding which entity should track movement for camelids: 50% of respondents wanted more information before making a decision; 21% preferred a single camelid-only database and 20% would like a separate database for each camelid species.
- 67% of respondents were not willing to pay more than \$10 per animal to track movement over the animal's lifetime; 8% were not willing to pay more than \$1 per animal and 24% had no opinion.

Nine press releases have been issued since Nov. 2004, explaining such topics as changes in USDA policy regarding the NAIS, the microchip frequency that may be mandated for future use in camelid ID and announcing results of the online survey. The CWG web site includes all press releases issued by the CWG Education and Outreach subcommittee. Because most camelid associations are on a quarterly publication schedule, there is a lag time in information dissemination via print media. To overcome this delay, the CWG press releases are also distributed to all camelid organizations and many agricultural publications via email. Local owner associations have been encouraged to add a link to the Camelidid.org web site from their association web sites; many have done so.

The CWG voted to approve the first recommendation in July of 2006 and submitted it to industry for comment. The first recommendation is:

“For participation in the NAIS, we recommend the implanted microchip as the preferred method for identification of camelids.”

Background:

Implanted microchips are already commonly used in camelids and have widespread acceptance among owners. In 2004 breed registries reported that approximately 44% of alpacas and 10% of llamas in their databases had been implanted with microchips. In 2005, the Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA) began to require a verifiable implanted microchip in all alpacas participating in any AOBA show or event and this requirement has likely increased the percentage of alpacas with microchips. An on-line industry survey conducted by the Camelid Working Group between February 7 and March 11, 2006 also provided support for implanted microchips. Some 1,756 responses from an estimated 5% of camelid owners were received. Approximately 68% of respondents indicated an implanted microchip was currently present in at least one of their camelids. Given a choice of implanted microchips, ear tags of any type and tattoos, 93% of respondents preferred implanted microchips as the single method to use for camelid identification in the NAIS.

CWG membership is being restructured as of August 2006 to include more camelid owners who have direct experience with camelid shows and events, to incorporate increased representation from all the major registries, and to form additional subcommittees.

Next Steps

The CWG will be drafting additional recommendations throughout the ensuing months, distributing them to the industry for comment, re-working any recommendations as needed based on comments received, and compiling a formal list of final recommendations to be submitted to the Steering Committee and the USDA. The additional recommendations will be initiated by the new subcommittees after consideration of the issues involved.

The Method of ID subcommittee will review issues such as selection of a microchip implantation site (this may vary between llamas/alpacas and camels); determining which party which party or parties (e.g., current owner, buyer, agistor) is responsible for microchipping an animal; and, when and how the existing population of animals already microchipped at 125-128 kHz can be grandfathered into the NAIS.

The Movement Tracking subcommittee will distinguish between reportable and recordable movements and recommend when and to whom reportable movements are submitted. They will address other related issues as well.

The Epidemiology subcommittee will review the diseases of concern (e.g. program diseases) that occur in camelids and provide a white paper on this topic to the camelid community. (A copy can be provided to the NAIS subcommittee as well if desired.)

To date, the CWG has not been able to find a reliable contributor to the working group from the camel segment of the industry, but efforts to recruit input from camel owners are ongoing. It appears that most camels used for public relations activities are already covered as Exhibitors under the Animal Welfare Act. Therefore, the USDA may already be aware of those owners and the premises housing camels that could potentially be commingled with other livestock.

Industry Concerns

The CWG also wishes to bring to USDA's attention numerous concerns expressed by camelid owners regarding the effects of the NAIS. Owners of both llamas and alpacas are worried about the financial burden the NAIS will place on them as small farm owners. If the expense of complying with the NAIS were to force some owners out of business, what would happen to their animals? Would the camelid industry see a rise in rescue situations? Will the financial and time demands of the NAIS discourage potential new owners from purchasing alpacas or llamas? Shows are a major marketing venue for both species and also a source of much enjoyment for camelid owners. Will there be a negative impact on llama and alpaca show participation? Will the NAIS negatively impact the rate of growth of the camelid industry?

It is important to note that nearly 50% of alpacas are already microchipped with 125 kHz (open and encrypted) and over 10% of llamas are microchipped using 125, 128 and 134.2 kHz devices. Availability of a true universal scanner is a common concern that is extremely important to camelid owners.

Owners are also fearful that if a mammalian disease outbreak were to occur, authorities would destroy all species of animals on a property without considering species susceptibility to that disease. Comments forwarded to the CWG by the NAIS webmaster as well as those received in response to the CWG survey expressed concerns regarding the constitutionality of the NAIS, penalties for non-compliance and the USDA'S presentation of inconsistent or incomplete information on the NAIS. The need to include camelids in the NAIS has also been questioned. Many camelid owners understand the need for the NAIS and seem willing to accept it as a part of doing business. Clearly, however, acceptance is not universal within the camelid industry and there are legitimate concerns even among those who support it.

Industry Background

The US camelid industry has experienced continuous growth since the early 1980's when large numbers of llamas and alpacas were imported primarily from South America.

As seen in Table 1, there are approximately 240,000 registered camelids in the alpaca and llama registries. However, many animals born in the past year are not yet registered while some deceased animals have not been reported to the registries. There is also a significant and growing population of non-registered camelids in the US. The ILR estimates that at least 10% of the llama population is not registered. While the number of non-registered alpacas is believed to be lower than that of llamas, it is likely increasing due to the high costs of registration relative to the value of non-breeding quality animals. Based on this information, we estimate the current total US camelid population to be approximately 300,000 to 325,000.

Table 1. Growth of New World Camelid population in North America

Year	Alpaca Registry, Inc.		International Lama Registry	
	Annual new registrations	Total registered	Annual new registrations	Total registered
1986	458	-	-	6,700 est.
1996	2,765	-	14,930	-
2004	7,339	49,047	5,768	149,524
2005	16,056	-	5,170	154,694
2006*	11,025	86,054	3,109	157,803

*Numbers as of 7-31-06

The major national industry organizations are the Alpaca Registry, Inc. (ARI), the Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA), the Alpaca and Llama Show Association (ALSA) and the International Lama Registry, Inc. (ILR). There is an Alpaca Show Division within AOBA. All of these organizations except AOBA provide on-line services for their members. There is no registry or owners association for camels.

The registries record date of birth and parentage of individual animals. DNA and/or blood type verification is required for all alpacas and for male llamas that produce more than 10 offspring. If owners choose to provide the information, the registries will also record changes of ownership, date of death, and microchip, ear tag or tattoo number and location. Microchip identification is not required for registration by either the ARI or ILR, but both registries have recommended this method of identification since the mid-1980s. Since July 2005, the AOBA Show Division has required an implanted microchip for identification of each alpaca attending an AOBA sanctioned event. As a result of this mandate, nearly 50% of registered alpacas now have an implanted microchip. Microchips operating at frequencies of 125 kHz (open and encrypted), 128 kHz and 134.2 kHz are currently used in camelids, but 125 kHz microchips are used most commonly.

The AOBA Show Division and ALSA account for the majority of camelid shows, but an increasing number of events such as county fairs are not under the umbrella of these organizations. For ALSA and AOBA sanctioned events, owners must provide their name and contact information as well as a copy of the registration certificate for each participating animal. All alpacas attending an AOBA sanctioned event must have a microchip in place and the microchip number is verified on-site at each show. Most AOBA-sanctioned shows also provide on-site microchip insertion for any animals for which a microchip cannot be detected. Alpacas undergoing transfer of ownership while being purchased under contract can be entered in an

AOBA show by the new owner if the seller provides a permission to show form. This form lists the name and registration number of the alpaca and the name and address of the buyer and seller. Animals entered in either ALSA or AOBA sanctioned shows must also satisfy all appropriate state and federal health requirements as evidenced by a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) or other health papers as required. Superintendents of individual shows are responsible for recording the information required of show participants and for the timely submission of this information to AOBA or ALSA show administrators.

Although some animals are sold at local livestock auctions, the majority of camelid sales are conducted via private treaty and industry-sponsored sales and auctions. Generally, the sales transactions involve a transfer of ownership that is recorded on registration certificates and includes contact information for both the new and former owners. A CVI listing the address of the new owner is commonly involved also.

As noted above, much of the information needed for trace back in the event of a disease outbreak is currently recorded within the industry, but it may not be readily accessible, reliable or available in a timely or organized manner. For example, the registries have the ability to record animal births, deaths, changes of ownership, individual identification devices and animal descriptions, but can only do so if and when owners submit the data to them. Information available for animals entered in AOBA or ALSA shows includes the registration number, microchip number (if recorded on the registration certificate) and owner name as submitted to the show associations by show superintendents. However, those camelid movements involving commingling due to change of ownership, boarding or breeding activities might only be recorded by owners and/or by a CVI if interstate transport is involved. Recording the movements of non-registered animals is more problematic. Obviously, some changes in the way the industry conducts its business would be necessary in order to fully satisfy the goal of the NAIS.