

Officials bemoan lack of livestock ID plan

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U.S. officials are bemoaning the lack of a national livestock identification plan, saying it is hindering investigations into disease outbreaks.

Government officials say they recently had to close an Alabama mad cow case because they couldn't trace the animal to prevent other cattle it had contact with from entering the food chain, The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday.

The fatal brain-wasting disease, known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, can cause a similar severe neurological ailment in people who eat products from infected cattle.

The 10-year-old Alabama animal was diagnosed with mad cow disease in March, most likely contracting it by eating contaminated food during the first year of its life. Officials wanted to identify the cow's birthplace to track other cows that probably ate the same feed.

A proposed national livestock identification program has met strong resistance, although Canada, the European Union and other nations have established such procedures that allow authorities to track sick animals to prevent disease outbreaks.

Debate in the United States involves such questions as whether the system should be mandatory, who should control the data and what sort of technology should be used.

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