

Flokk's response to CFIA's "What we heard report"

Mark Olson

President, Flokk Systems

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On February 12 the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) (CFIA) released the report "[What we heard report – Consultation on proposed changes to Part XV of the Health of Animals Regulations \(Identification and Traceability\), Canada Gazette Part I](#)" (the report).

The report summarizes the CFIA's response to submissions received during the [consultation to the draft amendments](#) of the "Health of Animals Regulations (Identification and Traceability)" completed Q2 2023.

[Flokk Systems Inc.](#) was the only organization authorized to partner with the CFIA and provide recordings of the producer information sessions offered in conjunction with this consultation.

Flokk submitted [extensive contributions to the consultation](#), and we are pleased to see several of our comments reflected in the report.

In this article we provide our thoughts on the report.

The CFIA report reflects adoption of the term "approved indicator" by the CFIA, which provides flexibility to adopt new animal identification methods without having to revise the regulation.

In practical terms as at Q1 2024, an "approved indicator" is a [Canadian Cattle Identification Agency](#) (CCIA) approved Radio Frequency IDentity (RFID) tag. For clarity and simplicity this document, and all Flokk documentation, consistently use the term "CCIA tag" to refer to a CCIA approved RFID ear tag as is in common use as at Q1 2024.

Key points:

From the report:

“The CFIA anticipates publishing the final amendments in the Canada Gazette Part II in 2024.”

The final hope for those skeptical mandatory animal traceability would ever come to pass were extinguished when the NDP accepted the pharmacare plan, sustaining the Liberal/NDP confidence-and-supply agreement and ensuring no Federal election before 2025.

We have heard from several reliable sources the soft launch will be mid 2025, and the hard launch (i.e. penalties applied for non-compliance) sometime in 2026.

Successful bureaucrats finalize the regulations they want, then write the report that justifies them. Publication of this report is reliable evidence the amendments are finalized, will be published sooner rather than later, and are inevitable.

From the report:

*“ Industry and consumers have both indicated that they want CFIA to deal effectively and consistently with instances of non-compliance. This involves issuing administrative monetary penalties (AMPs) as notices of violation with warning or **with financial penalty** (emphasis ours), depending on the nature of the violation.”*

There will be significant financial penalties imposed on ranchers who fail to comply with the regulations.

The careers of senior level management at the CFIA and CCIA will be at risk if the animal location reporting necessary to address a significant animal health incident are found delinquent. The CFIA and CCIA will not hesitate to apply every tool at their disposal to ensure compliance.

Avoiding financial penalty provides a compelling incentive for cow/calf ranchers to subscribe to Flokk to ensure compliance with minimal cost and effort.

Our comments on "Elements not well supported":

Of the four "Elements not well supported" that impact cow/calf ranching, Flokk mitigates all of them.

Stakeholders expressed concerns that veterinary clinics and feedlots would no longer be eligible to be approved identification sites.

Flokk appreciates the necessity for this change. Delaying application of the approved identifier increases risk from animal exposures that cannot be traced.

Flokk mitigates the impact of applying the CCIA tag at birth because:

- having a Flokk at hand enables use of the CCIA tag to identify calves to record animal events, providing a return from applying the CCIA tag at birth
- Flokk drastically reduces the cost of submitting the necessary animal birth events

Concerns were raised about requirement to report "time" and "licence plate" for livestock movements.

Flokk makes this reporting simple and easy to accomplish, eliminating this concern.

Concern that smaller agriculture fairs do not have the resources to comply with new requirements for fairs and exhibitions to report movements of livestock.

Flokk looks forward to providing all livestock groups, including 4H clubs and exhibitions, with low cost, easy to learn, easy to use tools for completing their traceability reporting.

There is an outstanding mutual opportunity for Flokk to support livestock fairs taking a leadership role in this important industry enhancement, and Flokk is actively seeking the partnerships necessary to achieve this.

Flokk can, with adequate support, eliminate this concern.

Concern about prohibition of unauthorized selling or distribution of approved indicators.

Without a way to authoritatively re-assign the Premises IDentity (PID) associated with CCIA RFID (CCIA tag), Flokk understands the need for this prohibition.

However we would propose Flokk could easily implement functionality where a CCIA tag could be read with a Flokk hand held, then report to the responsible administrator ([Canadian Livestock Tracking System](#) (CLTS)) the tag(s) re-assignment to an different PID, should the administrator chose to support this functionality.

Our comments on the "Elements with mixed reactions"

Requests to extend the allowable time to report an event or movement.

There is no need to extend the allowable reporting time past the proposed 7 days. Flokk makes reporting within hours, if not minutes, easy and affordable to achieve.

Concerns about retaining group moment and reporting for operators of assembly points and departure sites sending livestock to community pastures.

Flokk's confirms these concerns, and asserts there is no value in continuing this practice.

Flokk makes it simple and fast to collect and report the individual CCIA tags associated with every animal in a livestock movement.

Concerns about the incorporation of the passive reading principle.

Our experience from field testing is that a Flokk hand held can read every functional CCIA RFID tag instantly with a single attempt.

When a CCIA tag cannot be read it is not a transitory issue; the RFID component of the CCIA tag has failed. Best industry practice would be to mandate replacement of the failed CCIA tag and submission of the animal CCIA tag re-assignment to the CLTS. Passing the failed tag down the supply chain simply prolongs the issue and raises risk that can be mitigated with minimal cost and effort.

The passive reading principle is an unnecessary exemption that will encourage inadequate practice and avoid acquisition of, or necessary repairs to, equipment. The affordability of Flokk's hand held removes any excuse for not replacing an inadequate RFID tag reader.

The 1-year transition period after publication for producers/owners of livestock.

There is no need to extend the transition period past 1 year. With the appropriate capital infusion Flokk would be ready for general availability Q4 2024, be in place on many operations by the soft launch date in 2025, and be in place on most of Canada's cow/calf ranches by the hard deadline in 2026.

Our comments on "Elements that require clarification or adjustments to the regulatory text"

Requests for the wording be refined in the regulatory text regarding movement reporting to leased pastures

We were pleased to see issues related to leased pastures being considered.

Our observation is the majority of prairie cow/calf pairs spend their summer on leased pasture, often very remote from the PID of the animal owner.

This creates significant risk for unreported proximity of animals in adjacent pastures, or co-mingled through failure in containment.

These issues could be resolved by requiring a Premises IDentity (PID) for every leased pasture and reporting animal movement to/from leased pasture.

Flokk can easily and simply collect and report these movements.

Requests for clarification on the requirement to provide your premises identification number when purchasing approved indicators when your operation has several premises identification numbers

Our observation is that PID administration has been lax, in many instances PIDs are used today that were acquired in contexts which are now obsolete, and the dual application of PID as both location identifier and CLTS customer identity has, and will continue to, cause issues.

More than clarification is required. Proactive review and audit of existing PID's, termination and consolidation of obsolete PID's, and far more effective tools for validating PID's, are necessary.

Our comments on the "Appendix" items

Comments related to tag costs and concerns with tag retention

We regularly hear from ranchers about tag retention.

Better options in approved tags have become available, and while they offer better retention they are more expensive.

We believe significant improvement in tag retention will be gained through digitization of herd management. Ranchers currently implant CFIA tags toward the outer edge of the ear because they must visually inspect the CFIA number if require it for some future purpose.

Once the rancher has a Flokk they no longer have any need to visually inspect the CCIA tag. The CCIA tag can now be implanted as close to the root of the ear as practical, making it far less prone to snagging and loss.

Comments related to the obligations of livestock transporters with regards to the *Humane Transport Regulations and Livestock Traceability Regulations* and the concern of duplication in recording of information

Flokk's vision has always been to collect every animal event once at the source; the animals side, then transpose and transmit the event to multiple partners/stakeholders as required with no additional effort on the part of the rancher.

This principle directly applies to this situation. Flokk already generates electronic transport manifests for use by the producer, and will automate initiation of [electronic manifests](#) by partnering with organizations like Livestock Identification Services.

Comments related to the collection and access of livestock traceability information

The personal information collected by every organization, including Flokk, that is engaged in livestock traceability needs to be protected in compliance with, and excess of, Federal, and any applicable Provincial, privacy protection legislation.

Flokk is unique is that it can be purchased for outright acquisition (save licensing of the embedded software) and used without ever having to submit personal information to Flokk, though using a Flokk in this way requires traceability events be uploaded to the CLTS by the rancher, rather than being submitted automatically.

Blanket application of personal information protection to all aspects of traceability processes provides convenient justification for responsible administrator(s) (e.g. the CCIA) to resist providing broadly accessible assertion of animal ownership, a valuable industry service they possess the authoritative data to offer, but are resistant to providing.

Responsible administrator(s) could implement and broadly offer animal ownership assertion in ways that ensure protection of personal information.

The responsible administrator(s) collect and hold reliable contact information. They could offer a service where they broker a message to the contact related to a specific CCIA tag without disclosing any of the recipients personal information to the initiator of the message.

Such a service would be enormously valuable to a private citizen needing to locate a responsible party for a found animal, or an investigator needing to assert if an individuals possession of an animal or carcass is legitimate. Requiring the digital reading of a CCIA RFID tag to initiate the message would ensure these messages are legitimately associated with an animal of concern to the message recipient.

This opportunity should not be pursued at the moment; it will be challenging enough to engage ranchers in this process without raising concerns of personal information protection. But assertion of personal privacy protection over all aspects of livestock traceability in Q1 2024 is not sufficient justification to avoid exploration and implementation of valuable industry innovations at a future date.

Comments related to requests for government funding in order for industry to implement the proposed Regulations

We are working with the Government of Alberta to explore opportunities to streamline access to Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership funding to both advance the implementation of digital livestock traceability solutions and adoption of sustainable practice certification (e.g. [VBP+](#)).

However, there is a far better solution than government funding. Affordability.

Flokk offers unprecedented implementation affordably; our hand held, when acquired in conjunction with a service subscription, will be 1/4 to 1/10 the cost of current products. We offer a solution that is readily affordable to the typical cow/calf rancher without need for government subsidy.

Comments related to the need for inspector resources to ensure adequate inspection and enforcement activities

The fundamental processes and methods of Canadian animal traceability were established more than a quarter century ago.

Included in our submission was a proposal that non-digital collection and submission of traceability events not be supported. With the availability of affordable digital traceability tools such as Flokk, there is much to be gained, and a reasonable cost to secure, an entirely digital animal traceability system in Canada.

Information systems capabilities of 2024 have little in common with what was possible and affordable in 1998:

- Affordable, high capacity, edge devices like Flokk enable digital collection of data without dependency on connectivity.
- Machine vision can reliably identify individual animals, enabling automated tracking of animal movement and location.
- Blockchain raises the potential of decentralized, but authenticated and immutable, collection of animal events.
- Machine learning networks can effectively track and evaluate animal movement and other events through the entire production value chain. Human intervention can be dispatched by exception where and when it returns value, rather than consuming human resources to complete administrative tasks that inhibit and add cost to legitimate processes while often failing to detect and resolve issues.

It is vital that regulating animal traceability in Canada be seized as an opportunity for collaborative solutions that make the best use of Canadian technology, realizes the best outcomes for Canadian food consumers, and proves world leading processes, solutions, and companies that can then return wealth to Canada by selling products and solutions abroad.

Flokk has already established leadership in this space through extensive engagement with ranchers, engagement with the CFIA and CCIA, and membership in [Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef](#).

Comments related to administrative monetary penalties (AMPs) under the *Health of Animals Regulations*

The relationship between the Federal Department of Finance and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) is exactly analogous to the relationship between the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Canadian Cattle Information Agency.

Therefore, we anticipate the relationship between ranchers and the CCIA will be similar to their current relationship with the CRA. As demonstrated by the success of tax preparation software, there is immense opportunity providing tools that simplify and reduce the cost for ranchers to sustain their role in this relationship.

Conclusion

Inquires regarding this article can be made to the author at olsonm@flok.ca.