Canadian dairy farmers have always taken pride in being at the forefront of animal and food safety, and creating a traceability system is part of that ongoing commitment.

Dairy Farmers of Canada is including traceability into the proAction Initiative for on farm excellence as one of its six core modules. The others – milk quality, food safety, animal care, biosecurity and environment – are in various stages of implementation. The requirements for the animal care and livestock traceability modules will be available in the fall of 2015. In Ontario, training from an advisor will be available beginning early in 2016. Official validation will begin in September 2017.

Canada’s livestock traceability system is being implemented based on three foundational pillars – animal identification, premises identification, and animal movement recording and reporting. All dairy cattle are currently identified, and nearly all of nation’s dairy farms have an official premises identification number issued by provincial government. Recording and reporting animal movement is the last stage of traceability implementation, and industry is currently working toward achieving this goal.

Once in place, fully functional traceability becomes a powerful tool with many applications. It allows for fast and efficient trace-back of animals in the event of a disease or health threat, which can substantially limit the economic, environmental and social impact of emergency situations. Traceability, in addition to the other proactive on-farm measures Canada’s dairy farmers have undertaken, helps build and strengthen
consumer confidence, and assists in gaining and preserving foreign market access for live cattle and genetics.

“Traceability, in a nutshell, is about building credibility, respect and trust with our customers and just as importantly now, our trading partners. If you’re going to get into those foreign markets, you’d better have traceability,” says Sid Atkinson, an Ontario dairy farmer and chair of the livestock traceability committee of proAction.

In addition to improving emergency preparedness which protects producers and consumers, traceability technology can also be used by farmers to achieve even greater efficiencies and improved genetics. The Canadian dairy industry is world-renowned for its quality breeding stock and genetics. Technological advances that have come with the RFID tags have allowed multiple industry partners to input information on individual animals throughout their lives. The result is one stream of data management that can be added to by many stakeholders, which is used to further refine the attributes of the national dairy herd.

Pascal Lemire, a Québec dairy farmer and registrar for Holstein Canada, says he has been using traceability technology at his operation for years with great success.

“It’s like a social insurance number, and this is the only number that the cow will ever need, and it contains all the information we can have on that cow,” Lemire explained. “All industry partners – milk control agencies, breed associations, veterinarians, artificial inseminators, dairy equipment suppliers – will work with dairy producers to implement and work with traceability.”

Dairy producers are using traceability technology in conjunction with other technologies that record how often a cow is milked, how much volume she is producing, and even what the fat percentage of her milk is on any given day.

“We can create a picture of all the information we have on a cow with just her identification number. This information is useful for the farm in terms of herd health, productivity and other farm management applications. All of this is related to that one identification number – it is very exciting,” said Lemire.

For more information, please visit

www.tracecanada.ca
www.dairyfarmers.ca/proAction