Electronic ear tags for complete automatic identification of pigs from birth to post-slaughter C. Electronic tagging for the traceability of fattening pigs - a cost-benefit survey

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Key words
Survey, Traceability, Fattening pigs, Electronic ear tags, Electronic Identification

Aim of the study
The aim of this study was to assess the need for and acceptance of an identification system with electronic ear tags, and to analyse the ensuing benefits and costs. The results should provide evidence as to the feasibility of an electronic tagging system.

Material and methods
Experiences, benefits and costs relating to an electronic tagging system for fattening pigs were considered in a written survey of commercial farms, livestock dealers and slaughterhouses, advisory services and legislative authorities. A written approach was made to 1,001 German-speaking farms in Switzerland on which pigs are kept, together with 98 farmers or companies and organisations which had taken part in a practical trial on the manageability of electronic ear tags for pigs on commercial farms and in slaughterhouses. The results were evaluated separately for two groups, “farmers” and “trial participants and organisations”.

Results and significance
The majority of farmers questioned opposed the traceability of fattening pigs on an individual animal basis (47 %). 54 % of the group comprising trial participants and organisations agreed with the traceability of individ-ual animals in the case of fattening pigs. A large majority (72 %) of pig farmers saw no need to make any changes to the present tagging system. More than half the respondents (52 %) from participants and organisa-tions voted for changes. However, the respondents also saw the benefits of tracing an individual animal: certifying the provenance of animals and assuring the quality of the meat (pig farmers: 24 and 19 %; participants and organisations: 20 and 16 %). From the perspective of those questioned an electronic ear tag should not incur higher costs than those of the plastic ear tag currently in use.
The markedly positive attitude of participants and organisations to the need for and acceptance of an identification system with electronic ear tags can be explained by the fact that the managers of farms which had already participated in one of the practical trials saw the sense in using an electronic ear tag. The negative attitude in the “farmers” group, on the other hand, reflects the general scepticism and reservations of farms towards innovation. The most important arguments for retaining the status quo were that the current identification system was adequate and that changes would bring no benefit, only more expense. The farmers complained – certainly not without justification – of steadily rising costs in all departments. In order to increase farmers’ acceptance of such a system, the benefit to their business must be made clear and the extra expenditure and (additional) cost must be minimised and transparently structured and spread. The use of an electronic ear tag for (fattening) pigs makes sense when it generates a benefit which profits everyone involved.

Publications, posters and presentations
Zähner, M.; Burose, F. (2009): Elektronische Ohrmarken zur Rückverfolgbarkeit von Mastschweinen Funkti-onssicherheit, Ohrmarkenverluste, Nutzen und Kosten, Neuerungen bei der Tierverkehrskontrolle. Lecture and report at seminar “Agridea-Kurs Schweinehaltung“, 23.06.2009 in Sursee.

Project *1.06.08*

Project duration *July 2006 - December 2009*