

BORDERS BEEF FARMER HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF EID IN CATTLE

There is huge potential for cattle farmers to use Electronic Identification (EID) to unlock data which could improve the profitability of their herds, according to **Robert Neill** who uses EID extensively in his herd of 350 breeding cows and their progeny.

Robert, who farms with his wife Jak at Upper Nisbet, near Jedburgh, is using a panel Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) reader on the side of the cattle crush so he can now run 40 cattle through the crate in ten minutes, reducing stress and handling. He said: "I believe there is definitely a need for cattle EID; it speeds up the process of weighing cattle for market and removes human error."

Robert is well qualified on the subject, having completed a Nuffield Scholarship on cattle EID. He studied systems in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina and concluded that a national database needs to be developed to be used for benchmarking and analysis. He said: "For the beef industry to survive in an ever-changing world, farmers need to be using the information that can be collected to make more informed decisions about their business."



He also believes that the use of EID combined with a real-time database would eliminate the need for paper passports for cattle, which could make the system more efficient and potentially save thousands of pounds each year in administration of cattle movements by the BCMS.

Upper Nisbet lifted the QMS/Agriscot Scotch Beef Farm of the Year title in 2012, and Robert's accolades include being a former Farmers' Weekly Beef Farmer of the Year and, more recently, a recipient of the Future Farming award. Robert has been at the forefront of trials and developments in cattle tagging and ID.

He now routinely uses DNA tissue sampling tags and explained: "As the new-born calves are tagged with these new tags, a sample of tissue from the ear is stored in a small pre-printed sealed test tube, which is then sent to a laboratory and tested for BVD."

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In 2014, he started to work with Scot EID as part of their Ultra High Frequency (UHF) trial and has fitted UHF/LF hybrid tags to all breeding stock and all calves born in 2014. He also started using Farmplan's Psion Workabout Pro, which is a handheld device that can scan RFID tags and has all the herd information stored on it. As well as being able to read tags, this device allows births, movements and drug administrations to be recorded, as well as any other observations that might need to be recorded whilst out in the field. This information can then be synchronised with the data held on the farm computer.

Recently, Robert has also developed a bar code labelling system. He said: "The system is really useful when the vet comes to blood-test animals and saves a lot of time looking for the appropriate bar code for each animal. A bar code printer is linked to the weigh head so that as the ear tag is scanned it prints the correct label for that sample."

Robert found that there were health and safety benefits to electronic tagging of cattle, too. During the last decade in the UK there have been 50 fatalities as a result of working directly with cattle. He said: "The ability to read tags from fixed panel readers and long pole readers will reduce the likelihood of injury, and if the use of EID can reduce the risks involved then this must be an incentive to introduce compulsory electronic tagging."

The technology may seem daunting, but there are no real barriers for farmers to embrace it. Most have smart phones now, and the opportunity to have herd information available at their fingertips and stored securely in the cloud will appeal to them.

Robert believes that EID is the equivalent of precision farming for the livestock sector and said: "We need to attract more young people into farming; this sort of technology makes farming sexy and will hopefully encourage young people to choose it as a career."

Robert will be speaking at a series of workshops to promote the use of EID to be hosted by QMS this December. The workshops will highlight the benefits, both to farmers and to the industry as a whole, of using EID in cattle.

Robert Gilchrist, Knowledge Transfer Specialist with QMS, said: "While cattle EID is not currently compulsory, that time is coming and rather than just using EID tags to satisfy legislative requirements, businesses have a fantastic opportunity to make use of the technology in a number of different ways."

He added: "We are fortunate to have Robert presenting at our workshops; he is a fantastic example of a farmer embracing the latest technology and using it to add to his bottom line."+



Cattle EID demo at Agriscot

> 18 November at 11.30am.

Cattle EID workshops

> Wednesday 9 December

Scott Henderson hosts at Carswadda, Lochfoot, Lochhead, Dumfries, DG2 8JE

> Monday 14 December

Stephen Allardyce hosts at East Town Farm, Tarland, Aboyne, AB34 4TD

Details of further workshops can be found at www.qmscotland.co.uk/events

To register for the EID workshops please visit: www.qmscotland.co.uk/events