



Pilot project on the new “*Ultraflex*” bovine identifier :
Producers’ comments and initial results

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Since the introduction of Quebec's traceability system, *Agri-Traçabilité Québec (ATQ)* has conducted various pilot projects that have led to the documentation and improvement of identifier retention. In March 2009, ATQ tested tags composed of an ultra-flexible (*Ultraflex*) plastic, where the backside panels have a rounded shape. This project, scheduled to terminate in 2012, is being conducted on seven dairy farms and five cow-calf operations, for a total of 745 head of cattle being studied, some of them having been re-tagged.

Here are the results from two farms participating in the project: Benoit Côté of Maple Hill Farm, a purebred Hereford beef producer and also a commercial feeder-calf producer located in Shefford, as well as Marc and Roch Bilodeau, with Cynthia Morin, of the dairy farm R & M Bilodeau in Sherbrooke.

Ultraflex – an innovation for Quebec producers

Ultraflex is the new cattle identifier, possessing three characteristics that increase its retention rate:

- The flexibility of the plastic
- The rounded shape of the backside portion
- A ring around the stem of the tag's back portion, which strengthens the tag's attachment

The combination of these three factors ensures that the back portion of the tag perfectly matches the natural contours of the ear (see photo 1). Since there is no space between the identifier and the ear, the back panel is therefore less susceptible to catch on feed bunks, for example.

At first glance, Roch Bilodeau was sure that the Ultraflex tag would perform better, mainly because of the flexibility of the plastic.



In order for the back portion of the tag to fix tightly against the animal's ear, it is now recommended to install both tags (the visual panel and the electronic RFID tag) into the first third of the ear, near the head.

Photo 1: The back portion of the identifier fits tightly against the ear.

Nevertheless, Benoit Côté notes that the animal's environment remains the most important factor regarding ear tag retention, even with the Ultraflex identifier. It was often mentioned that cattle feeders constructed with vertical steel bars are more likely to cause tag loss. Therefore, when replacing equipment, it would be wise to choose a model that will reduce tag drop. Round tubing is recommended, while square tubing and flat bars are to be avoided because of their sharp edges (see photo 2).



Photo 2: Vertical square tubing or flat bars are likely to increase tag damage, particularly when the animal withdraws its head. Here you can see evidence of wear, a result of repetitive movements.

As for Mr. Bilodeau, he suggests installing round Carlon tubing over any flat bars (see photo 3). However, this solution has not yet been tried on his farm, because of the requirements of the tag retention project.



Photo 3: Carlon tubing is simply slit open along its length and placed around the steel bars.

Impressive results

In general, the rate of breakage of the identifier's backside part is higher in the beef sector, which eventually leads to the loss of the entire tag. The following tables show the results obtained to date (with re-tagged cows):

Maple Hill, cow-calf operation	Rate of <i>breakage</i> backside part of the electronic RFID tag	Rate of <i>loss</i> electronic RFID tag	Rate of <i>breakage</i> backside part of the visual panel	Rate of <i>loss</i> visual panel
Allflex regular	35 %	5 %	10 %	10 %
Ultraflex	0 %	0%	0 %	0 %

R & M Bilodeau, dairy production	Rate of <i>breakage</i> backside part of the electronic RFID tag	Rate of <i>loss</i> electronic RFID tag	Rate of <i>breakage</i> backside part of the visual panel	Rate of <i>loss</i> visual panel
Allflex regular	10 %	10 %	0 %	25 %
Ultraflex	0 %	5 %	0 %	5 %

ATQ wishes to thank all the producers who have participated in the various tag retention projects. Their valuable collaboration has led to the development of *Ultraflex*. Without their support and their astute comments and suggestions, this product could not have been properly tested and proven. In conclusion, it should be noted that *Ultraflex* is an exclusive product worldwide and this identifier is currently available only in Quebec.



Benoit Côté of Maple Hill Farm.



Marc and Roch Bilodeau, with Cynthia Morin of the dairy farm R & M Bilodeau.

For more information on traceability in Québec : www.atq.qc.ca