Traceability of Equine Microchips

Who is currently trying to trace these and for what purposes?
- Angela Pelzel-McCluskey, other state/federal animal health officials, states with chips tied to EIA program, owners of lost/stolen horses, rescue groups
- Disease traceback (EP/EIA cases), clues to origin of stray/smuggled horses, recovery of lost/stolen horses, determine history of rescued horses

What are the components of a “successful” traceback?
- Contact made with an entity that has information about the specific horse connected to that microchip?
- How much time did it take to get to that key entity with information?

Case Study #1

- Load of 10 horses intercepted being illegally moved into Texas from Mexico. All are test positive for equine piroplasmosis. All are found to have microchips.
- 982 and 985 prefixes
- (example 982009102709466)
- Online prefix lookup gives manufacturer name and contact phone
- Call to manufacturer provides name and contact phone for distributor (located in Europe)
- Calls and email to distributor identifies that several of the chips were sold to ANCCE - breed registry for Spanish PRE’s (Pura Raza Espanola)
- Next step is to contact breed registry…..
Case Study #1

- Successful traceback; identified smuggling ring focused on illegal importation of Spanish PRE’s from Spain brought to Mexico, transiting through Texas, with destination of California.
- Testing of additional horses in California identified several more EP+
- Future use of PRE breed registry site for microchip lookup
- Time to success: 4 days

Case Study #2

- Stray horse intercepted on the Mexican border. Test negative for diseases of interest, but had microchip and attempt must be made to identify ownership.
- Used chip prefix to identify manufacturer.
- Called manufacturer who has sold to distributor.
- Called distributor – 3 problems:
  - “Is this a 2mm chip or a 4mm chip?” - I don’t know it’s in a live horse.
  - “A horse? This chip is a wildlife chip. It’s supposed to be implanted in a fish.”
  - Chip is so old that the database for it is in an ancient IBM computer that only 1 person in the company still knows how to search. Will call you back. 2 weeks later – no records found.
- DEAD END
- Time to dead end – 2 weeks

Case Study #3

- Cluster of 17 EP-positive bushtrack QH racehorses in Tennessee. In addition to lip tattoos, several of the horses have microchips. All have lost their AQHA registered names somewhere along the way.

Case Study #3A – “Joyas”

- 985 prefix – called manufacturer
- Manufacturer sold to veterinary supply company
- Vet supply company out of business purchased by other vet supply company
- New vet supply company doesn’t record who they sold a specific microchip number series to anyway
- DEAD END (for any chip that goes through this vet supply company)
- Time to dead end: 3 days

Case Study #3

- In this case, the fastest method of traceback is using the lip tattoos – call AQHA get registered names from lip tattoo records. Except…some of the lip tattoos had been altered (tattooed over) to specifically change the identity of the horse.
- For those whose lip tattoos could be confirmed
  - Time to identification by lip tattoo: 1-3 hours
- Traceback of microchip numbers begins again at the manufacturer.
Case Study #3B – “Juanito”

- 985 prefix – called manufacturer
- Manufacturer sold to small private distributor
- Called distributor, left message
- Distributor called back next day. Sold chip to a vet practice.
- Called vet practice – no electronic records. All paper. Advocate assistant will ask vet to look.
- State with microchip required for EIA program. Called state – no record of that chip number.
- Vet returns call next day, no records found, asks, "well, when did I work on the horse and who owned it?"
- 4 days later – can’t find any records to match.

Even when given registered name of the horse and year likely worked on, could never find record of the chip number or the horse.

DEAD END

Time to dead end: 1 week

Conclusions

- Multiple parties responsible for keeping records in the life of an equine microchip. Failure to keep/transfer records at a single step yields permanent dead end.
- Best outcomes for tracing have been achieved when the end information is maintained by breed registries or equine industry groups.
- Having to trace stepwise starting at the manufacturer is time consuming (although the manufacturers have done a great job maintaining their data).
- Need an online microchip look-up tool for equine chips that will at least provide the name/phone number of the final entity that retains the data on that chip (similar to what is used for small animal lost/found).

Next Steps

  - Over 100 people attended representing state/federal animal health officials, microchip manufacturers and distributors, and equine industry leads.
  - Presentations were posted to the NIAA website and a written summary of the meeting is forthcoming.
  - Overall conclusions were that microchipping should be the goal for universal equine unique identification and that this should be an industry-driven initiative.
  - The general consensus was that the individual industry silos should maintain and protect their own data and that an online equine microchip look up tool indicating which silo maintains the data on that chip would be a safe and effective way to allow for microchip lookup.
  - Working group formed to meet regularly and maintain momentum.

Industry Initiatives

- The Jockey Club has implemented microchipping as a requirement of TB registration for all 2017 foals and beyond.
- The U.S. Equestrian Federation
  - Dec. 1, 2017 – all hunters, jumpers, and equitation horses required to have microchips to accumulate points.
  - 2019 competition year – all horses required to have their microchip registered to participate in USEF sanctioned events.
- The U.S. Trotting Association is conducting a test program to use microchips for identification of standardbred racehorses in place of the current lip tattoos or freeze brands.
- Other breed and discipline groups are entering into active discussions regarding the future of equine microchips as part of their programs.
Practitioner’s Role?

• Assisting in the implementation of the equine industry’s initiatives
• Providing subject matter expertise to owners, trainers, and industry groups on making sure microchips are somehow connected to accessible data that will meet their intended needs
• Are your medical records currently searchable by microchip number?
• How do we as AAEP members support and facilitate the need to connect microchip data securely?