

IMI Global

Last year it was all-natural cattle that were bringing a premium at auction markets and video sales. This year it's age and sourced verified cattle that seem to be what the buyers will pay a little more for. Whatever the claims that cattlemen are making about their cattle the big question is . . . can they prove it? Can they verify they were raised naturally or that their string of yearlings all came from the United States?

Oh sure, it's easy to say that your cattle are natural, or that they were all born and raised right on your ranch, especially if you can get a premium price just for saying so. But as we all know, cattle buyers are no dummies and they have been burned too often recently to just take your word for it. They want some sort of verification and an entirely new industry has sprung up to give it to them.

Integrated Management Information, Inc., or IMI Global as it is more commonly known, is one of those companies. Incorporated in 1998, the Castle Rock, Colorado, firm was one of the first to get into the third party auditing business in beef cattle. They had the foresight to see that BSE changed everything as far as the international beef trade was concerned. The folks at IMI Global knew that as we tried to reopen our export markets to American beef that our foreign customers would want some assurance from an independent third party that the cattle were not originally from Canada or Mexico. Or that they were not over 30 months old.

The export market these days demands verification and the USDA would love to fill that role. Yet we've all seen how customers like the South Koreans trust the USDA. And the government's role in tracking down the salmonella in salsa is another vivid reminder of their shortcomings. The feds ruined one market after another — tomatoes, peppers, cilantro — they were all mowed down in the government's best Three Stooges imitation to find the source of the outbreak. Surely there has to be another option for age and source verification than the government's NAIS.

Lucky for us . . . there is.

IMI is one of many companies trying to

elbow their way into the verification market. IMI provides livestock tracking and herd management software, database applications, consulting services, and verification solutions for the livestock and meat industry. It develops their own Web based applications and auditing processes that allow the livestock industry to record, manage, report, and audit information that is required for beef to be marketed under different brands and USDA protocols. They keep track of cattle much like the Department of Motor Vehicles uses VIN numbers to keep track of cars. Only without the rude service and long wait in line!

IMI guides companies who are trying to launch a new product through the maze of government regulations and USDA requirements that can kill any good idea before it gets off the ground. IMI also helps firms verify their marketing claims as to breed, feeding practices and other claims. They do this through audits, both in person and on the phone. IMI also helps companies create their own premium brand identity with the goal of adding value to the product. And consumers seem to be catching on both here and in foreign markets.

The list of niche beef programs and their requirements these days is mind boggling. The list of USDA programs alone seemingly use up every letter in the English alphabet: USDA QSA, NHTC, PVP, EV, PFEU and on and on. Each with a different set of standards. Then there are all the private natural and organic programs. These special programs all offer some extra profit potential for the rancher but first you must work your way through the maze of bureaucratic red tape. You may need help from someone who knows the ropes. That's where IMI comes in.

Although IMI Global has been around for 20 years their moment in the sun seems to be right now. As we all know, under terms of the 2002 Farm Bill, retailers nationwide were supposed to display on their packaging a label identifying the country of origin (COOL) for meat products a long time ago. The packers and their lackeys have put it off as long as they could but COOL will finally become a reality starting in the fall of this year. IMI

has been preparing for this day for a long time.

IMI knows COOL. They have been providing food verification systems since 1995 to producers all the way through to retailers and have developed over 60 percent of all USDA PVP and QSA programs in the United States. They were the first technology company to automate the first Ranch to Retail USDA Process Verification program that meets the Country of Origin Labeling regulations. Recently IMI Global became the exclusive worldwide marketing partner for the "Born & Raised in the USA®" Label for Beef, Pork, Poultry, Lamb, Fish and Game and will become the exclusive worldwide marketer of the trademarked label.

John Saunders, President and CEO of IMI Global says, "With the deadline for retailers to begin displaying country of origin labeling fast approaching, this agreement is both timely and potentially one of the most important partnerships IMI Global has been a part of. We believe the Born & Raised in the USA® label, backed by IMI's third-party verification systems, will find broad acceptance among domestic packers and retailers who are subject to this mandate beginning later this year. The brand, which includes a prominently displayed American flag, is a compelling visual that we believe will appeal to packers and retailers while giving consumers a simple and recognizable label to identify a product exclusively born, raised and processed in the USA. Our goal is to make Born & Raised in the USA® the industry standard," says Saunders.

IMI has also worked with worked with groups like Arkansas Agriculture Department, Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Guaranteed Gardiner Genetics Angus Program, Merial SureHealth, Missouri Department of Agriculture, Oregon, Ranchers Renaissance, Superior Livestock Auctions, Western Video Market and others to age and source verify cattle. Their stamp of approval has been accepted by the buyers and has made it possible for sellers to get more money for their cattle at auction.

Through IMI's SupplyVerified web site ranchers and buyers can check on age and source verifications and for solutions to enable feedlots to comply with USDA Quality System Assessment requirements. On the web site meat packers, processors, and distributors can demonstrate to interested parties that their products comply

with USDA's QSA requirements and Export Verification requirements, as well as the USDA's Process Verified Program.

IMI Global is in the information business and the Internet is their platform of choice. Before selling it to Vance publications recently, IMI owned and operated CattleNetwork.com, an Internet-based online service, which provides news and information about the North American cattle industry. It has become a popular site and every day thousands of people receive the CattleNetwork newsletter via e-mail. IMI also started and then sold CattleStore.com, an e-commerce site for customers to purchase a range of products and supplies related to agriculture such as animal identification, medical equipment and veterinarian supplies.

In addition to owning USVerified.com and AgNetwork.com IMI also owns a popular horse web site called MyEquineNetwork.com. Over 13,000 equine enthusiasts receive IMI's e-mail newsletter about all things horsey.

Yet another interesting site IMI owns is PetSupplyVerified.com. Remember a few years back when all sorts of bad stuff from China started appearing in pet food? Pet

Supply Verified was developed as the pet food industry equivalent to human food quality assurance programs. Based on years of experience developing and implementing quality verification programs, IMI Global used that experience to help the pet food industry ensure quality assurance for their products. "We created PetSupplyVerified.com to ensure that you receive up to date and accurate information about the pet food industry and the quality of the products you purchase for your pet," says Saunders.

IMI is even in the education business with their IMI University IMI Global which offers education courses online anytime and anywhere.

As you can see, the one theme running through all their various enterprises is IMI's ability to manage and dispense data through the Internet. They have bet their business's future on it and their staff is well prepared. It's not often you find a person in the cattle business who graduated from Yale but IMI's Chief Executive office, John Saunders did. He founded the company in 1995 after previously being a partner in a strategic planning and management consulting firm. Rob Streight

Chief Operating Officer was a founder of Future Beef Operations and Cory Weaver, Vice President of Information Technologies, previously implemented inventory management systems for the U.S. Air Force and Navy.

Judging by their success thus far you could say that IMI Global's personnel, track record and business plan have been verified and approved by the American beef cattle industry.

— by Lee Pitts

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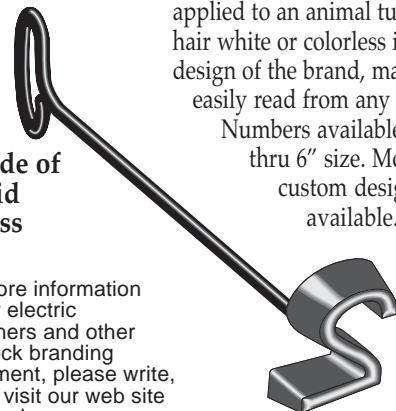
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