
Harmonisation of barcode numbers: toward an ICAR recommendation

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Correct and reliable identification of semen is an important element for traceability and sanitary security of these products for international trade and their use in breeding programs world-wide.

Furthermore the technique, how the straw is identified, affects every step of the marketing and selling process. With regards to sanitary security most countries have set up regulations on how semen-straws should be labeled. Article 3.2.1.10, paragraph 3 in Appendix 3.2.1 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code refers to the ICAR (International Committee of Animal Recording) standards for labeling semen straws. Current state is, that the required information is printed on the straw with no barcode. This means, that this information can be read by eye, but cannot be handled electronically. International trade volume with semen is still growing. Sales process could be made more efficient by introducing a system which allows the straw identification to be read and handled electronically.

To address this topic the EU-QualiVet group has proposed a system to identify semen straws by barcode, remaining within the frame set by the legislation and offering a maximum of flexibility for semen processing and trading companies. French trials have shown that the technical problems of printing and reading barcodes on semen straws have been solved. Key factors to make the barcode readable and useable worldwide are: the use of one uniform coding system (Code 128C), the unique identification of the processing AI Centres and that the information on how to interpret the barcode is easily available. The recommendation of the QualiVet group is shown in table 1.

Table 1. QualiVet recommendation for the coded information.

Digits	No. of digits	Description
1-3	3	Identify the AIC (sufficient to specify all the World's aics)
4-5	2	The production year
6-10	5	The processed batch

This proposal has been submitted to the International Committee for Animal Recording (ICAR).

To avoid parallel and inconsistent systems, negotiations are continuing with the National Association of Animal Breeders (NAAB) in order to harmonize the AI-Centres Identification with the NAAB stud code system. The required flexibility can be achieved with the obligation, that the code must begin with the centre identification (in the U.S. already given by the NAAB bull code). The rest can remain undefined as long as somewhere the information about the content of the barcode by AI centre is available and easily accessible. ICAR would host a web site which provides this information. Coordinated action is needed to assure that the advantages and benefits for international trade are realized.