

Retinal scans eyed for New Mexico cattle

It sounds like science fiction, but New Mexico scientists are testing eye-scanning technology on cattle to use in a national animal health tracking system.

"Retinal scans are part of a growing technological trend in cattle identification," said Manny Encinias of New Mexico State University's Clayton Livestock Research Center. "It painlessly flashes a beam of light into the eyeball and records the pattern of veins in the eye."

Each retina, whether bovine or human, is unique and an eye scan is considered one of the most accurate forms of identification.

The research is part of an effort by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement a National Animal Identification System. The goal is to track all animals and premises that have had contact with an animal disease of concern within 48 hours of an initial diagnosis.

In a first-of-its kind project for New Mexico, scientists used a \$3,000 retinal scanner not much larger than a small video camera to record IDs at three locations during a six-month period.

The scanner downloads the image data into a computer database.

A final report on retinal animal ID technology is being compiled for the USDA.

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