

Identigen earns USDA seal

By [Mark Fagan](#)

November 6, 2007

Identigen North America's DNA system for tracking meat identity and processing locations now has the USDA's seal of approval.

Identigen's U.S. operation, based in Lawrence, and its TraceBack system now qualify as a Process Verified Program by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, joining three dozen other agricultural suppliers of products and services whose operations meet consistent levels of quality.

The designation is no small feat, said Don Marvin, Identigen's president and CEO in North America, where the company is just now working to land some of the country's largest retailers as customers.

Identigen started working on the certification early this year, and officials and scientists watched last month as USDA inspectors spent two days checking out the expanding laboratory, testing and office complex at 4824 Quail Crest Place.

Consistency is a key component for TraceBack, which uses DNA technology to track the identity of a meat product from beginning to end — “from farm to fork,” Marvin said — so that quality, safety and other favorable characteristics can be confirmed.

“Our technology is akin to the same technology used in forensic investigations in humans,” Marvin said. “People either go to the gas chamber or ... they're found innocent based on the same similar type of forensic analysis that we use. We just don't use it in humans. We use it in bovine and swine.

“So it's pretty reliable, when you see people in the justice system either being put behind bars or being released because they're innocent. That should give you an idea of the accuracy of the technology. It's pretty significant.”

That's the kind of security retailers can use to assure consumers they're getting what they pay for.

And when it comes to premium cuts, organic options or other special products, retailers can back up their

higher prices by affixing TraceBack stickers to each package.

Now, behind the sticker, Identigen's quality-management systems will be carrying the highest-level approvals from the USDA.

“It shows we've been heavily audited by a major component of our government, and that they've determined that we have all the quality standards in place that make DNA TraceBack consistently reliable,” he said. “And when you see DNA TraceBack on a labeled package of meat, you can believe it.”

The Lawrence-based operation already is conducting several pilot testing programs in Lawrence for potential North American customers, Marvin said. The Lawrence operation already handles testing for major retailers in Europe, including Tesco and Superquinn in Ireland.

“We intend to make Identigen a global company of consequence, and USDA approval of DNA TraceBack system marks a significant accomplishment towards this goal,” said Patrick Cunningham, chairman of Identigen Ltd., the Lawrence-based operation's Ireland-based parent company.

Originally published at: http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2007/nov/06/identigen_earns_usda_seal/