

Farm Food Voices DC 2007

The National Small Farm Grassroots Lobby Day, February 14th

Hosted by National Independent Consumers and Farmers Advocates Fund (NICFA Fund)

Who we are and what we stand for:

We represent the other food system. The one featured in warm fuzzy human interest stories. In a day of global corporate outsourced industrial factory farmed vulnerable centralized government-approved pathogenic devitalized food, we are the antidote: regional, neighbor-friendly, heritage-based, transparent, nutrient-dense, freely chosen, safe, and secure. We are native America, the strength of freedom. We're the food system without subsidies, honest and true. We offer alternative answers to every malady and every fear. We feed the world through our communities: farmers, butchers, bakers, chefs, homemakers, feed mills, agronomists.

Why we oppose any government managed or funded National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

WHAT IS NAIS?

NAIS is another expensive, large government program that discriminates against small farmers. Proposed by the USDA, NAIS imposes on all livestock and animal owners a high-tech, high-cost livestock backtrack system requiring:

- a. Registration of any premises where even one animal, a chicken, pet donkey, etc... is kept, in a database accessible to many agencies and foreign governments.
- b. Radio Frequency ID (RFID) microchipping or tagging of every animal.
- c. Reporting and recording each animal's movements within 24 hours, under threat of severe penalty, including confiscation of animals and fines of \$1000 per day, per infraction.

WHY WE OPPOSE NAIS

1. **It will not work.** In Australia and Canada, where it has been tried only on cattle, error rates are in the millions. USDA promises of efficacy are both premature and inaccurate. It will be a database nightmare, bogging the entire food system down in a quagmire of undeleted and unentered data.
2. **Manipulation potential.** With the significant data breaches that have occurred, especially in government systems, the temptation and/or propensity for price and market manipulation from global and industrial interests with this data is virtually unquantifiable.
3. **Moving objective.** Since first conceived, NAIS has been touted for disease prevention, then as a marketing technique. Proponents do not have a clear justification. USDA encouraged feeding dead cows to cows for 40 years until mad cow--so much for the trustworthiness of expert scientists.
4. **Discriminatory toward community-based food systems.** The requirements and infrastructure are highly prejudicial against small producers and local food systems. The provisions favor industrial and global producers and processors. To saddle small producers with industry problems is unconscionable.
5. **Veterinarian-farmer enmity.** County fairs, local abattoirs, hatcheries, and veterinarians who have always been farmers' friends will become the new enforcement points. The ensuing mistrust and circumvention will destroy strength and safety.
6. **Cost.** So far, costs estimates vary from 40 cents per animal to \$30 per animal--including chickens. The alleged cure is far worse than the disease. The paperwork alone, along with bureaucratic harassment, will force many small farmers to throw up their hands in surrender.
7. **Unnecessary.** Current prevention and tracking techniques are working well. Anyone who wants this type of tracking can already have it. A market driven and paid-for system accomplishes all the security necessary.
8. **Government involvement means mandatory NAIS.** USDA officials have made it clear that efficacy demands 100 percent participation. Any government program will soon morph into a mandatory one. Industry operated and funded is fine.
9. **Faith.** Ultimately, as with all government programs, this boils down to a matter of trust. Community-based food commerce engenders trust inherently with relationship transactions that are more accountable than bureaucratically-operated systems.
10. **Historically unprecedented.** For the first time in civilization, virtually every Little Red Hen must be registered in order to deliver one egg to her caretaker. Such licensing should surely give every American pause.

MANDATORY?

Due to massive opposition around the country, the USDA and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Colin Peterson appear to have changed their original position that NAIS be made mandatory at the federal level. Yet the USDA is giving large grants to State Agriculture Departments to push NAIS in each state, demanding that they achieve “full participation.” In earlier documents, USDA said that without “100% voluntary participation” registration will become mandatory. A few states have already required premises registration. Other states coerce registration when state programs, like 4-H and fairs, require registration to participate. Livestock markets are also under pressure, or taxpayer funded financial incentive, to require premises registration, and some have done so, forcing livestock owners to comply or suffer the loss.

PREVENT DISEASE?

NAIS does not prevent disease, or prevent disease from entering the food supply.

WE SUPPORT legislation that would defund NAIS.

NICFA Fund Information

NICFA Fund is the national fund of the Virginia Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (VICFA)
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Following are excerpts of relevant documentation--much more is available (see contact info above).

USDA’s “Cooperative Agreements” With States

All italicized quotes are taken from the “*Cooperative Agreements for Implementation of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS); United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Veterinary Services (VS). Announcement Type: Initial Announcement . Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 10.025, Plant and Animal Disease, Pest Control, and Animal Care*”

REWARDS: Using taxpayer money, under questionable statutory authority, the USDA is awarding large grants, called “Cooperative Agreements,” to state Agriculture Departments to increase the premises registered in each state—the first stage of the NAIS implementation program. According to this 28-page application, the state Ag. departments “*must include an aggressive plan for education and outreach, including effective use of existing outreach resources such as cooperative extension.*” [p.1]. Extension agencies have traditionally been an information resource for farmers. They are now predators as part of this coercive effort. States also “*must contribute premises registration data to the National Premises Information Repository (NPIR),*” [p.1] meaning that personal information of registrants becomes part of a national database. Potential registrants are not necessarily informed of this.

VOLUNTARY?: The USDA says, “*as a voluntary effort, full implementation of the NAIS [emphasis added] will be achieved as a phased-in plan, emphasizing premises registration as the foundation of the system,*” [p.4] Thus the Cooperative Agreements state the USDA’s intent of 100% participation.

BENCHMARKS: By demanding registration benchmarks, [p.5] the USDA makes clear their intent for “full participation”: *The work plan must also include specific goals of achievement (measurable outcomes) regarding premises registration efforts. In addition to projected numbers of premises registered, performance measures may also be included to document effort and productivity such as number of meetings conducted; number of producers/owners contacted; outcomes associated with animal identification coordinating committees; outreach materials distributed; mass mailing results; cooperative extension programming outcomes, including NAIS funded and unfunded cooperative extension efforts; and use of promotional incentives to register premises. Measurable outcome(s) for FY2007 NAIS Implementation Cooperative Agreement funding, including premises registration, among others, is/are to be emphasized over measurable outputs (what was accomplished is to be prioritized over what was done and documented in quarterly and final reports).*

COERCION AT MARKET ENTRY POINTS: “*States will be responsible for selecting cooperating livestock markets and dealers in their State and coordinating support, including documentation of performance for required reports.*” [p.6]

These are just excerpts. The document also includes suggesting “integrating” premises information from existing programs into the NAIS “voluntarily registered” database and financial or other prizes for those who register **and for “cooperating” livestock markets—who then force their producers to register in order to sell their livestock.** [The “Cooperative Agreements” is available from the US Gov’t, or upon request to: editor@vicfa.net]

Abuse of the Database--already

Would be registrants are told that their information, once entered, will *only* be accessed in a disease outbreak. In Colorado's recent blizzard, the USDA used the NAIS Premises Registration database to find farmers they "thought might need help." Regardless of the stated intent, even before they have statutory authority to establish this program, the holders of the database are using the premises registration information outside the parameters they originally stated, making meaningless their statement that the information *will only be used in the event of disease outbreak*.

Why do we need a National Animal Identification System for trade reasons?

Answer: We don't.

The claim that we need to open our export markets for more beef exports does not stand up to scrutiny. Currently, U.S. imports far exceed U.S. exports in beef, veal, sheep, lamb, and goats. USDA export figures below (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/MeatTrade>), show the fallacy of the need to export more product. In 2006 alone, over twice as much beef was imported into the U.S. as was exported. The numbers on lamb and mutton were even more divergent. The number of head of cattle imported in 2006 was 45 times the number of cattle exported. So where is this surplus of production that we need to export? It is non-existent.

Import/Export status of livestock 2006 (Nov)

2006 Beef and veal imports (Nov)	Carcass wt., 1,000lbs	2,837,763
Beef and veal exports (Nov)		1,049,250
2006 Cattle imports (Nov)	Head	2,092,298
Cattle exports		46,175
Lamb imports & Mutton imports (Nov)		171,595
Lamb exports & Mutton exports (Nov)		16,918

According to Texas A&M University, using USDA data, the US import volume since 1999 has routinely exceeded export volume by approximately 200,000 metric tons. The monetary trade surplus in the same years was created by exporting *US high quality beef products* and importing *low quality beef products*. We essentially are asking the people of the US to be satisfied with a reduction in quality food to accommodate the desires of the export market, not by a need to move surplus meat. In 2005 the United States produced 25.6 billion pound of beef, but only exported 2.5 percent of that total. So, the USDA wants to set a tagging program that will benefit less than 3% of the beef production? In addition, Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) has been virtually been put out of the loop for meats, although the 2002 Farm Bill required the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations by September 30, 2004 that would require retailers to notify their customers of the country of origin of "covered commodities." Covered commodities include muscle cuts of beef (including veal), lamb and pork, and ground beef. Due to strong opposition to mandatory labeling by food retailers, wholesalers and processors, and major U.S. trading partners, a law enacted in January 2004 delayed the mandatory COOL requirements. Americans are ignorant, under the current system, of where their meat in the supermarket comes from. A voluntary labeling bill first introduced in 2004 by then House Agriculture Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) and re-introduced in June 2005 by Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) would have produced a market driven program with traceback and labeling, yet it was abandoned.

- There are approximately 800,000 ranchers and cattlemen in the United States
- In January 2005, there were 95.8 million cattle in the United States
- The average herd size is 40 head.
- USDA's latest estimate for 2006 beef supply is 28.8 billion pounds, based upon US production of 26.3 billion pounds, imports of 3.5 billion pounds and exports of 93 million pounds. American consumed more beef than we produced. We do not need to infringe upon every citizen who owns livestock for the benefit of a small number of exporters who want to have their business interests subsidized by the public.

The average producer of the average size herd will not benefit from the export market. The producer who chooses to export, such as Creekstone Farms, should be allowed the tools to meet their export needs, not denied them, as the USDA has done by denying Creekstone their own BSE testing. To continue to insist only the government is capable of providing what the market demands is tantamount to communism. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association developed the U.S. Animal Identification Organization (USAIO) for the specific purpose of meeting the market demand for traceability. Following are excerpts from an article, by Lester Aldrich of Dow Jones Newswires, explaining that the USDA-organized NAIS has pushed aside a market driven approach. Why does the USDA in competition with private sector programs that meet market demands, and why is the USDA intent upon withholding BSE testing from the private sector?

EXCERPT:

KANSAS CITY (Dow Jones)—The U.S. Animal Identification Organization has been suspended for lack of interest and financing, said the group's chairman, Charles Miller. Miller said the non-profit organization's board made the decision to suspend operation Jan. 31, although the framework of operations will remain intact if there is a need for it to be revived in the future.

U.S. livestock and poultry producers now are left with a series of for-profit animal identification systems that cost more but provide other benefits, like carcass quality information, to producers.

Allen Bright, former NCA administrator for the association's Animal Id Commission, which worked on the USAIO's framework, said the USAIO was intended to satisfy U.S. Department of Agriculture tracking needs when the USDA wanted a single non-profit database that was held in private hands.

Funding was to come from livestock and poultry producers who entered their data into the system, Bright said. Those private systems seem to hold some appeal, Miller. Cattle producers *already are getting premiums for supply or process verification*, and such programs could become the norm in the future.

--Lester Aldrich, 2/8/2007 (reprinted with permission)

Open Letter to the Honorable Members of Congress

For the first time in human history, families who keep a laying hen for breakfast eggs or a steer for homegrown steaks will need a license from the government, under a policy written by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Under the sincere-sounding mantras of finding diseased animals and holding onto export markets, this proposal strikes at the heart of America's food security.

Known as the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), it will encumber home producers, small producers, and non-export producers with a labyrinth of paperwork and cost-prohibitive infrastructure. NAIS will encourage biosecurity vulnerabilities in America's food system by further centralizing production and processing in transnational industrial Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations(CAFO's).

Enamored of Australia's and Canada's foray into a cattle-only identification system, the USDA is moving forward with required multi-species micro-chipping despite the abysmal database failure and astronomical cost overruns in both those countries. Heavy fines and criminal punishment await noncompliance--including the 4-H calf or the family chicken.

Fueled by concerns of avian influenza and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease), NAIS is both redundant (current food safety regulations within the industry are more than adequate) and inappropriate. Will the USDA employ the full force of government to round up the 60,000 backyard chicken flocks in Los Angeles County---most of which are owned by Hispanics--and destroy them if they are unregistered?

Historically, avian influenza outbreaks have moved through CAFO's, not decentralized, non-industrial type flocks. And mad cow, according to scientists, is the result of feeding dead cows to cows--a practice that gained popularity after it was promoted by the USDA for three decades with freebie dinner-seminars to livestock farmers. Is it not disingenuous for the fraternity that gave us mad cows to now be the creator and enforcer of a licensing system unprecedented in human civilization? In fact, a system that discriminates against small producers who refuse to use practices that compromise their animals' natural immune systems?

An entire immune-enhanced, pasture-based, community-marketed livestock movement exists in this country that guarantees true food security to farmers and patrons. Smallness and closeness provide inherent integrity in this system, which is America's heritage. Just as the U.S. Cavalry hunted down the Native Americans and placed them on reservations in order to eliminate competition for land for settler homesteads, today's USDA is systematically annihilating non-industrial farmers and home producers under the guise of "safe food."

Just because government's experts say something does not make it so. In the famous Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court ruled that slaves were not humans. Two decades ago parents were hauled off to jail for truancy violations, because most education experts said home schooling would create a generation of jailbirds, social misfits, and illiterates. In fact, the opposite has been the case. USDA experts encouraged feeding dead cows to cows, which they now say causes mad cow disease. They also encouraged feeding chicken manure to cows, and have now said this is unacceptable. What major USDA-sponsored "oops" will we discover tomorrow?

We implore you for the sake of all that is good and noble--indeed for national security reasons--to continue letting us feed ourselves without USDA bureaucratic licensing. Halting government-sponsored NAIS will enable true American food security to continue strong and free.

From the National Independent Consumers and Farmers Advocates Fund on behalf of the small, sustainable farmers of America, and the consumers and communities who depend on them.

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