

NAIS Facts and Myths

The intent of this document is to provide factual information to livestock owners on frequently asked questions and statements made in regards to the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

BACKGROUND:

Although discussions on animal ID have taken place for many years and started well before 2002, a concerted industry led effort that started in 2002 resulted in the development of what is now referred to as the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). More than 250 producers, industry representatives and animal health officials from all livestock species groups have been organized into various NAIS Species Working Groups and now provide advice to USDA on how the US can best protect our livestock industry from a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD). This effort is ongoing and the species working groups that are developing recommendations that are specific to each individual species.

NAIS GOAL:

The 2002 goal was to achieve a traceback system that can identify all animals and premises potentially exposed to an animal with a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) within 48 hours after discovery.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Below is information that was prepared with the input of all livestock species groups in regards to questions and statements that have been published by media or asked by livestock owners. The answers are based on the work plan that industry and livestock producers have provided to USDA, APHIS, VS which in turn USDA used to formulate the NAIS Strategic Plan. The USDA strategic plan does not include all the details that species groups have provided. For individuals to get a FULL understanding of the details about NAIS, they should also read the species working group recommendations.

Comments submitted on NAIS:

- 1) Animal diseases are scare tactics and are not real.
- 2) Small hobby farmers are not impacted by livestock diseases like commercial farmers.
- 3) If we close all the borders to any livestock imports, we will not need an NAIS because we would not bring any diseases into the country.
- 4) NIAA is comprised of the major meat-packing corporations and lobbied USDA to develop the NAIS.

Questions:

- 5) Why is the government doing this to us?
- 6) What is premises registration?
- 7) What information is collected to register a premises?
- 8) Does a producer report GEO (geographic) coordinates to register a premises?
- 9) If I register my premises, will the government track me via satellite?
- 10) Why do all livestock premises need to be registered?
- 11) If I register my premises, will the government know how many animals I own and sell?
- 12) How is the premises information protected so it can only be used for the purpose intended?
- 13) Will NAIS require that every livestock owner has to microchip their animals?
- 14) Will NAIS require every animal on the farm to receive an individual animal ID?
- 15) Can the animals that receive an RFID chip as proposed in NAIS be tracked via satellite?
- 16) Will NAIS require that every movement is to be reported to a government database?
- 17) What are the anticipated costs to livestock owners to participate in NAIS?
- 18) Will NAIS become mandatory by 2009?

C 1) Animal diseases are scare tactics and are not real.

Depending on the type of disease and the types of livestock it may impact, livestock disease can have a huge impact on livestock owners, industry and consumers. The Foot and Mouth (FMD) disease outbreak in the United Kingdom (UK) resulted in many livestock producers (small and large) losing their livestock, and the disease had far-reaching economic impacts on the overall UK economy. Canadian livestock producers are still suffering from the effects of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). Many cattle producers went out of business because of the effect the disease had on the price of cattle. The faster a disease can be contained, the quicker normal livestock commerce can resume and the economic impact can be lessened.

C 2) Small hobby farmers are not impacted by livestock diseases like commercial farmers.

Impact of a livestock disease is not governed by the size of the operation. Any size livestock operation can be impacted by a livestock disease. However, the level of risk of obtaining a disease is related to exposure of animals to a disease. A small livestock owner that participates in events where animals from many locations are co-mingled is at greater risk of having animals exposed to a disease than a livestock owner that operates a closed herd with no animals moving in to the operation. Not all diseases are transmitted through animal contact alone. Certain diseases can be spread by contact with humans as well as other sources (airborne diseases, spread of disease through insects, etc.)

C 3) If we close all the borders to any livestock imports, we will not need an NAIS because we would not bring any diseases into the country.

More frequent inspections and closing borders for livestock moving into the United States (US) would provide additional safeguards to prevent diseases from entering the country. However, livestock diseases can be brought into the country in various ways that do not involve livestock imports. The notion that the US is free of any disease is also false. There still are many diseases that impact livestock owners every day.

C 4) NIAA is comprised of the major meat-packing corporations and lobbied USDA to develop the NAIS.

The National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) is a broad-based national organization that works to develop consensus among its members on issues of animal health and animal care. The members of NIAA include individual animal owners, veterinarians, livestock associations, State and Federal animal health officials, and businesses involved in animal agriculture.

NIAA served in a facilitation role beginning in 2002 to bring the animal agriculture industry and animal health officials together to work, voluntarily, on developing the basic standards and framework of the United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) which was largely accepted by USDA and evolved into the NAIS. NIAA does not lobby Congress or State Legislatures, but strives to provide education, information and solutions on animal agriculture issues.

In the past several years, dating back to 1994, NIAA has sponsored four national symposiums on animal identification, the most recent one in September of 2005. These symposiums are designed to provide a forum for information exchange and discussion on the issue of animal identification for any and all interested stakeholders. The next symposium, ID/INFO EXPO 2006 is scheduled to be held in Kansas City, MO August 22 through 24.

More information on NIAA is available at www.animalagriculture.org.

Q 5) Why is the government doing this to us?

As mentioned earlier, NAIS originated with livestock producers and their organizations who understand the importance of protecting our livestock industry from the impact of a foreign animal disease and the disastrous effects it could have on livestock owners, industry and consumers in this country. Industry and producers felt that rather than having to avoid a top down approach, it was in their best interest if a plan was developed by industry and producers with input from government animal health officials. With the input from animal health officials, this group was able to formulate what future steps we can all take to improve the system we have in place today. Livestock species groups are providing USDA with a work plan and recommendations on how to best achieve the 48-hour traceback objective while having the least impact on the way livestock owners operate today.

Q 6) What is premises registration?

Premises registration involves assigning a unique 7 character ID to a location where livestock are housed or kept (farms, markets, exhibitions, etc.) and record contact information for that location.

Q 7) What information is collected to register a premises?

A To register a premises, either an address is needed or GEO (geographic) coordinate information is needed to identify a location that does not have an address. In addition, the type of premises is collected along with the contact information for the person most knowledgeable about the livestock at the location. Contact information involves a farm name, name of a person and information on how to reach that person either via mail or phone. In addition, states may request information such as type of species.

Q 8) Does a producer report GEO (geographic) coordinates to register a premises?

A **NO:** Most premises are registered using the postal address. However, there may be locations that do not have an address. In such cases, GEO (geographic) coordinates can be used. States registering premises can obtain GEO (geographic) coordinates by using driving directions provided by the person registering a premises.

Q 9) If I register my premises, will the government track me via satellite?

A **NO:** A premises is a location on the map, and does not provide any tracking capability of either livestock or people living at that location. The information associated with a premises is minimal and does NOT involve livestock ownership information. As a matter of fact there are public Internet websites available that already provide satellite pictures on most locations around the world.

Q 10) Why do all livestock premises need to be registered?

A With premises information available, in the case of an animal health emergency, animal health officials will have the ability to quickly assess the size and impact a disease may have on livestock in a particular area. Appropriate action can be swiftly taken which will minimize the effects on **ALL** livestock owners in the affected area. In addition, animal health officials will be able to inform the premises contacts in the affected area and provide information on effective measures to protect their livestock from the disease in question.

Knowing all the locations and the type of livestock at a particular location and having the means to quickly reach a person knowledgeable about the livestock at that location will improve response time and limit the impact on many producers not affected by the disease.

Q 11) If I register my premises, will the government know how many animals I own and sell?

A **NO:** Premises registration does not involve recording of animal ownership and reporting of numbers of livestock at a location. Premises registration requires the name of a contact that is most knowledgeable about the livestock at a location. This might be an owner of the livestock, owner of the facilities, or a person taking care of the animals that neither owns the animals nor facilities. For example, a boarding stable that may have multiple owners of horses in the stable would get one premises ID for that location, and the premises contact would be the person managing the boarding stable.

Q 12) How is the premises information protected so it can only be used for the purpose intended?

A Any premises related information will be kept in a secure database at the state and federal level. Animal tracking data will be maintained at the state or private level. Access to this very specific information will only be provided to state and federal animal health veterinarians. Industry has been adamant that information stored in NAIS is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and is not shared between inter government agencies. Individual states have passed laws to protect premises and animal ID information and USDA has provided language to legislators to protect information collected under NAIS when and if the program becomes nationally mandatory.

Q 13) Will NAIS require that every livestock owner has to microchip their animals?

A **NO:** Individual species groups have made recommendations in regards to the type of official ID devices that can be used to uniquely identify animals **IF** official ID is needed. **ONLY** the cattle industry has recommended RFID ear tags for cattle that include an RFID chip. None of the other species groups have recommended that RFID devices be used solely. USDA has **NOT** endorsed any particular technology and remains technology neutral.

Q 14) Will NAIS require every animal on the farm to receive an individual animal ID?

A **NO:** The goal of NAIS is **not** to identify every animal. Animal ID or group ID can be used to provide traceability for those livestock and movements that pose the greatest risk of spreading a disease. Each individual species-working group is identifying the types of movement that would require

some form of animal ID. In all cases, animals that are born and raised on the farm would not need ANY form of official ID unless they moved from the farm. Depending on the reason for movement it may or may not require some form of official ID. For example, cattle moving from pasture to pasture within a state may not need any official ID. However, cattle moving from a farm to an exhibition would need some form of official ID. Animals leaving the farm for custom slaughter and personal consumption would not need to be officially identified.

Many livestock owners already use some type of ID device for herd management purposes.

It is envisioned that those types of ID devices can be replaced with ones that will meet official ID requirements. In those cases, livestock owners would have some offsetting costs. For those species that may use RFID devices, livestock owners would not have to invest in equipment to read RFID ear tags since the recommendations from industry and USDA include that the individual animal ID number needs to be visible on the ID device, so livestock owners can manually record those numbers.

In addition, there may be costs associated with reporting livestock movements. Mechanisms will be put in place to either report movements by paper or electronically. Most livestock species working groups have recommended that only the receiver needs to report movement. It is also recognized that most livestock movement reporting can be incorporated in existing systems producers already use for farm management. (i.e. DHIA system, breed registries, animal health tests, etc)

Q 15) Can the animals that receive an RFID chip as proposed in NAIS be tracked via satellite?

A There are many RFID technologies available today for various uses. Most are not compatible with each other. The proposed RFID standards for cattle has limited read range (<4 ft), and does not provide the capability for tracking via satellite or greater distances.

Q 16) Will NAIS require that every movement is to be reported to a government database?

A **No:** Species working groups are providing recommendations as to which movements are most important in the spread of diseases (check with each species group recommendation for specifics.) Currently, there are requirements for reporting movement of livestock between states (interstate movement) and there may also be requirements of livestock movement within certain states (intrastate movement.) For example, branding states have movement reporting requirements already. In addition, USDA Secretary Johanns announced in 2005 that all animal movement data will be maintained privately by industry or states, and USDA will need access to this information in the case of an animal disease.

Q 17) What are the anticipated costs to livestock owners to participate in NAIS?

A It is understood by participants working on the NAIS recommendations that there will be costs to producers to participate in NAIS. However, all those participating felt that if due diligence was used, the benefits of having an NAIS system would outweigh the costs. As far as what costs livestock owners could expect; depending on the state there may or may not be a fee for registering a premises. In addition, **IF** animals require some form of official ID there may be costs associated with obtaining an ID device and applying that device before the animal leaves the farm.

Q 18) Will NAIS become mandatory by 2009?

A Industry realizes that implementing NAIS is a major undertaking and will require many years. The original proposed dates were based on recommendations by various industry groups made in 2003 and 2004. The draft documents that USDA released for public comment outlined timelines for possible mandatory implementation of individual components of NAIS. However, these dates were only an estimate and input regarding the program is still being received. Since, the process of obtaining input and funding have taken longer than anticipated, it is highly unlikely that the proposed timelines can be met. There are currently no efforts underway for rule making for a mandatory program. The current voluntary status allows USDA, producers and industry to work out the system details and continue to measure progress being made. If USDA initiates a rule making process (which has not happened yet) and barring any animal health emergency, it would take USDA at least 2 years to complete a mandatory implementation of any components. States may choose to proceed individually in implementing components of NAIS at the state level. In the event of an animal disease emergency, USDA may need to take steps to implement action to address the situation.