

September 24, 2009

VIA FACSIMILE AND EMAIL

Deputy Undersecretary John Ferrell  
Deputy Undersecretary Ann Wright  
Marketing and Regulatory Programs  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Re: National Animal Identification System

Dear Undersecretaries Ferrell and Wright:

For the last several years the USDA has been trying to implement the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). But, after spending nearly \$150 million, the Department has little to show:

- Only 37% of the estimated number of premises that NAIS applies to have been registered.
- The tens of thousands of comments that have been submitted to the USDA, both when the previous administration proposed mandating NAIS premises registration for some federal programs and during the more recent summer comment period, have been overwhelmingly negative.
- More than 85% of the voices heard during the USDA NAIS Listening Sessions earlier this year were raised against NAIS.
- State legislatures in Arizona, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, and Utah have passed laws barring mandatory NAIS at the state level; the South Dakota Legislature unanimously adopted a similar resolution; more than a dozen states have proposed similar bills; and Wyoming even terminated its agreement with USDA to implement NAIS.

Clearly, any attempt to force NAIS upon the United States agricultural community, even with modifications, will be in stark contrast to the people's will.

What the USDA's attempt to implement NAIS has done, however, is divide our agricultural system into two opposing camps: the meatpackers and those invested in vertically integrated systems of agriculture vs. the American family farmer, including the organics community and homesteaders.

The USDA's own cost-benefit analysis shows that NAIS works in favor of vertically integrated agriculture and is detrimental to small farms. The analysis revealed these problems even as it severely underestimated the number of farms, did not reflect the variety of techniques used by family farms, and improperly discounted the cost to farmers to comply with the technological costs of the program.

Furthermore, the cost-benefit analysis was premised on the assumption that the 2002 Census of Agriculture reflected the number of people who would be subject to NAIS. But the census overlooks those who make little or no money from agriculture, keep horses or other pets, or who

just refuse to comply with the census requests. The fact that the census severely underestimates the number of affected properties and individuals has been clear even in the early stages of NAIS implementation. For example, under a “voluntary” program, Massachusetts has registered more than 200% of the estimated number of premises in that state. The real costs of NAIS, to both the government and to individuals, cannot be accurately identified using the census estimates.

American agriculture is a diverse and complicated industry. It cannot be controlled as if it were monolithic, as NAIS seeks to do. The money spent so far in implementing the program has not been worthwhile, and continued efforts will lead only to more opposition and not more success. We would like to see the USDA halt the NAIS program and put its efforts into making certain that existing programs are working in the best interests of American family farms and farmers, supporting local sustainable agriculture, helping create viable markets for high quality foods, and ensuring that consumers can choose which foods and food sources they want to purchase.

Sincerely,

American Grassfed Association  
Citizens for Private Property Rights (MO)  
The Cornucopia Institute  
Dakota Resource Council  
Dakota Rural Action  
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance  
Idaho Resource Council  
Independent Cattlemen of Iowa  
International Texas Longhorn Association  
Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund  
Food and Water Watch  
Freedom 21  
Local Harvest  
Northeast Organic Farming Association Interstate Council  
Northeast Organic Farming Association – Massachusetts  
Northeast Organic Farming Association – New Hampshire  
Northeast Organic Farming Association – New York  
Northeast Organic Farming Association – Vermont  
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)  
Organic Consumers Association  
Powder River Basic Resource Council (WY)  
Property Rights Congress  
R-CALF  
Small Holders Alliance of Massachusetts  
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association  
Sovereignty International  
Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association  
Western Organization of Resource Councils  
Weston A Price Foundation

For more information, contact Judith McGeary at 512-484-8821 or [Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org](mailto:Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org)