

## **NAIS Alert -- Speak the Truth about NAIS to Secretary Vilsack in Connecticut on May 27!**

NOFA/Mass, May 5, 2009

There are forces in Congress and in the Obama administration that would like to press forward with the flawed NAIS (National Animal Identification System). They plan to phase in premises registration and animal registration as a part of existing mandatory animal health programs. But they are aware that farmers and consumers at the grass roots level are still adamantly opposed to this costly, intrusive, and ineffective program.

In an effort to gauge this opposition, Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack has scheduled "Listening Sessions" during the next several weeks in seven locations around the country to hear what the public thinks about going forward with this program (full notice at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-10037.htm>).

One of those sessions, on Wednesday, May 27 from 9 to 4 pm, will be in Storrs, Connecticut, at the University of Connecticut's Bishop Center. We are urging individuals, as well as representatives of farmer, consumer, and public interest groups from all across the northeast to attend this session. The new administration is still finding its way on this program, and a strong public opposition just may be enough to kill it.

### **NAIS Background**

NAIS was first proposed in 2005 as a mandatory 3-part program. Every location where a livestock animal was kept would be required to register on a federal database (premises registration), every livestock animal would be given a unique registration number on that same database which it would wear on a tag or implanted RFID chip (animal registration) and every movement of any registered animal off the premise would have to be reported to the database within 48 hours (animal tracking).

NAIS was met with such strong opposition that in 2006 the federal government said that the program would be "voluntary at the federal level". The USDA then proceeded to contract with states and animal associations to require participation in NAIS in order to participate in other state or breed-based programs. Now the federal government is looking once again at requiring NAIS participation.

The idea of NAIS was first proposed in 2002 by the National Institute of Animal Agriculture (NIAA), a private organization whose membership reads like a who's who of agribusiness: Cargill, Monsanto, the National Livestock Producers Association, the National Pork Producers Council, the National Renderers Association, veterinary medicine companies such as Pfizer and Schering Plough and, not surprisingly, manufacturers of animal ID and tracking systems such as Cattle-Traq, Digital Angel, National Band and Tag, and Animal-ID.

The interests of the ID and tracking systems manufacturers in such a program are pretty clear to see. No one knows exactly how many animals would be affected by NAIS, but starting with the nation's 63 million hogs, 97 million cows, almost 300 million laying hens and the annual slaughter of about 9 billion chickens for meat, the market is large.

The interests of NIAA meat producers in NAIS are also clear. They are large corporations that raise, kill, and process animals in CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations), huge facilities where animals are penned or caged by the tens of thousands (or, for poultry, the hundreds of thousands). Feed is brought in and distributed to the animals mechanically; manure is scraped or pumped out and stored in large lagoons or discharged into waterways. Systems are automatic and computer controlled, animals are identified by individual or by lot, everything is monitored. To the owners of a

CAFO, the NAIS requirements for identification and tracking are not burdensome. They are already a part of doing business.

More importantly, these producers are selling much of their product into export markets. The big corporations that dominate American meat production want export markets to perceive our meat to be safe. The easiest way to encourage that perception is to point to a trace-back system like NAIS and say that should a disease event occur we can quickly trace all the animals involved.

### **NAIS Does Nothing to Prevent Disease**

Of course, tracing an outbreak back does not prevent it, and prevention is what consumers want. But preventing an outbreak would require that we change the unhealthy, disease-ridden, antibiotic-laced and overcrowded conditions in which we raise animals. Healthy food requires living soil, clean water, fresh air, decontaminating sunshine, and adequate space for waste products to decompose naturally. None of these can exist under the overcrowded, production-oriented pressures of modern factory farms. To provide them would mean significant new costs that would put the owners at a competitive disadvantage in the global drive to raise cheap food. But that cheap food is coming at a tremendous cost in environmental degradation, human health and public dollars that we cannot any longer sustain.

NAIS is a one-size-fits-all program that will not work to increase the health of our livestock. Its only purpose is to convince export markets that we have an effective animal health program, and to make sure corporate middlemen are not liable when the inevitable outbreaks occur.

Join with us to tell the USDA “No to NAIS” There are no ways in which such a program can be redesigned to be effective. There are already plenty of animal-specific health programs that do a better job of containing disease than NAIS ever could. We should work with and improve them, not waste money on a new and complex one-size-fits-all scheme.

*For details on the Connecticut “Listening Session” on NAIS, check the USDA website at <<http://www.usda.gov/nais/feedback>>. On-site registration will begin at 8 a.m. on the day of each meeting. All persons attending must register prior to the meetings. Although preregistration is not required, participants are asked to preregister by sending APHIS an e-mail at [NAISSessions@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:NAISSessions@aphis.usda.gov) or calling 301-734-0799. In the subject line of the e-mail, indicate your name (or organization name) and the location of the meeting you plan to attend. If you wish to present public comments during one of the meetings, please include your name (or organization name) and address in the body of the message. Members of the public who are not able to attend may also submit and view comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <<http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS-2009-0027>>. For further information contact: Dr. Adam Grow, Director, Surveillance and Identification Programs, National Center for Animal Health Programs, VS, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 200, Riverdale, MD 20737; 301-734-3752.*