
The NAIS Animal ID Plan, Multiple Purposes, But a Single Focus???

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I'm still reading the first page of the executive summary of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) Draft Strategic Plan. The USDA is seeking input from all for the betterment of the whole. This is a process most of us are quite familiar with, at least in the world of democracy. Some would say the devil is in the details, but the first page certainly is worth contemplating more than once, particularly the critical issues.

The first three points are peppered with very positive comments, such as "strongest driving force; foreign animal disease; broad support among government, industry and public stakeholders; stakeholders provide broad support, prefer a mandatory program and even stronger support ... for a mandatory program." These comments are expected when prior reference connects the process to a foreign animal disease. It may be a stretch, but I suspect no one wants a foreign animal disease.

Four common stakeholder concerns are mentioned: Financial - "Who will pay?" Confidentiality - "Who will have access to the data?" Flexibility - "Will the NAIS accept data from existing identification systems and will producers be able to use the NAIS for other purposes?" Liability - "Will producers be exposed to unfair financial or legal liability?"

At present, answers to these questions are not available and obviously are components of a draft publication. Input from every person is very important as the process develops. Everyone should express an opinion.

The question about flexibility is the crux of most problems. If the NAIS is a state-of-the-art process to track "all animals and premises that have had contact with a foreign or domestic animal disease of concern within 48 hours after discovery," then adding other uses for the identification process makes the discussion extremely cumbersome.

In fact, as one moves to the second page, this double-headed focus becomes evident. The principle focus is to have "national data standards to ensure that a uniform and compatible system evolves" and yet principle two states that "NAIS must allow producers to use NAIS in coordi-

nation with production management systems."

These two principles are immediately followed by principle three, which says "APHIS must make the NAIS mandatory to drive investment and progress." Some good, thoughtful comments need to be expressed on just how a national system of disease traceback could effectively integrate with all the individual production systems used by producers across the country. The discussion is just beginning as to who owns the data, etc.

If we use the past as a basis for the future, there have been several excellent USDA programs implemented for tracking individual animal health. Of those programs, I cannot recall any that have been integrated into herd production programs. Is it possible for the NAIS to be an end-all of all end-alls?

Principles four and five of the executive summary call for "achievement of the 48-hour traceback goal" and assurance that "animal health officials have immediate, reliable and uninterrupted access to essential information that is protected from open disclosure." Should the plan's focus remain with animal health?

The plan and submitted comments, as well as the ability to submit a comment, are available at <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>. The primary contact for USDA is Neil Hammerschmidt, eradication and surveillance team animal identification officer, APHIS, 4700 River Road, Unit 43, Riverdale, MD 20737-1231. The reference document is agency docket number 05-015-1 and the docket identification number is APHIS-2005-0044.

Now is the time to ponder, think and act. Provide your written comments.

May you find all your NAIS-approved Ear Tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0249.

The National Animal Identification System Principles

1. Uniform – The NAIS must be based on national data standards to ensure a uniform and compatible system.
2. Flexible – Allow producers to use NAIS in coordination with production management systems, marketing incentives, etc.
3. Inclusive – APHIS is developing the NAIS for various species and must make the NAIS mandatory at a specified date to drive investment and progress.
4. Cooperative – Achieve the 48-hour traceback goal through state, federal, and industry partnerships.
5. Secured, reliable, and confidential information – Health officials need immediate, reliable, and uninterrupted access to essential information that is protected from open disclosure.

Source: USDA National Animal Identification System Draft Strategic Plan. The reference document is agency docket number 05-015-1 and the docket identification number is APHIS-2005-0044.