

Seen Any Tag Fairies Lately?

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Time does not stand still and the thought of how we got to this point certainly would cause a cow-calf producer to ponder. A big-picture question needs to be answered. Do we really need a mandatory individual animal and bird identification number or similar tracking?

A quick review of the comments to date on the Web site regarding the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) draft strategic plan would indicate mixed emotions. Those emotions tend to focus on various segments of the plan. One is the privacy issue.

How does a rancher move from the contentment of sitting back and watching the cows and calves strolling through the fields of grass with the anxiety of recording all those cows and calves in the event of a national need? The rhetoric can be heavy, but does not remove the fundamental change in philosophy. In its conception, the fundamental principle addressed by the plan is one of animal health.

“The strongest driving force for developing the NAIS is the risk of an outbreak of a foreign animal disease” is the logic behind the plan. The goal as stated is “to be able to identify all animals and premises that have had contact with a foreign or domestic animal disease of concern within 48 hours after discovery.”

Both the logic and goal of the plan are notable. Both statements are simply desired enhancements of a system already in place, a system that has a strong reputation for ensuring food safety in this country. It is not a perfect system, but one that has done a commendable job.

Perhaps the travel industry is in a similar situation. Our daily commitment to travel is not only an option, but also a demand. We all travel and have come to accept the need for oversight and safety regulations. The thin line between safety and tragedy is understood, but not welcomed. There is a certain level of risk acceptance. It is a risk we each incur by leaving home.

Keeping with the travel theme, our relentless desire to travel is the very reason the possibility of the introduction of a foreign animal disease is an issue. The process of human travel brings with it a lot of baggage, not all

seen by the naked eye.

Intentional or accidental, it makes no difference in the transmission of a disease. Once the organism is introduced, the organism must be exterminated, providing the goal is eradication. It’s the extermination process that is difficult because the undesired organism generally is in a host we appreciate, such as the family pet, the barnyard critters or ourselves.

Rapid identification of individual hosts would reduce the emotional impact of an event. There lies the purpose of the plan. Does the plan actually direct itself to that end, or is the effort muddled in technology fairies wishing for a new world? Are all fairies good?

Perhaps a good cup of coffee and some pondering on the past 100-plus years would not be bad. Yes, needs are changing, but the past response has been good. At least in the little world of the Dickinson Research Extension Center, with the help of the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association Brand inspectors, people found the calves, not tag fairies.

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 the 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 the agency docket number 05-015-1. The docket identification number is APHIS-2005-0044. Comments are being accepted until June 6, 2005. Now is the time to read and comment.

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 BT0248.



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