



## News Release

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### **NIAA Supports Veneman's Call for Immediate Implementation of National Animal ID System**

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. – The National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA), a longtime advocate of a coordinated, national system for animal identification in the United States, is urging congressional leaders to support Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman's call for immediate implementation of a national tracking system for animals.

On Dec. 30, 2003, Secretary Veneman announced that USDA would begin immediate implementation of a national animal identification system. *"USDA has worked with partners at the federal and state levels and in industry for the past year and a half on the adoption of standards for a verifiable nationwide animal identification system to help enhance the speed and accuracy of our response to disease outbreaks across many different animal species,"* Veneman said. *"I have asked USDA's Chief Information Officer to expedite the development of the technology architecture to implement this system a top priority."*

The Secretary's comments on animal ID prefaced her announcement of additional safeguards to bolster the U.S. protection systems against bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

In a letter mailed to Congressional leaders this week from NIAA Chairman of the Board Dr. Kenneth E. Olson and NIAA President and Chief Executive Officer Glenn N. Slack, it was stated that NIAA:

- **Believes a national system for animal identification will enhance protection of our nation's agriculture industry and its contribution to the U.S. economy against the ever-present threat of agroterrorism as well as unintentional foreign animal disease incursions.**
- **Endorses the U.S. Animal Identification Plan ([www.usaip.info](http://www.usaip.info)) as the foundation for USDA and Congress to work with the animal agriculture industry in development and implementation.**

Olson said USAIP was developed in 2003 by a USDA-led National Identification Development Team consisting of industry representatives and state and federal government officials. "The plan is built around the objective of being able to trace the origin of any animal within 48 hours," he said.

- **Supports Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman's call for immediate implementation of a national animal identification and tracking system in the United States.**

Slack said USAIP already sets an aggressive timetable for implementation – some components of the plan would be implemented beginning in July of this year – "but, the Secretary's call for immediacy could help remove bureaucratic hurdles and barriers that typically exist when implementing a new program."

- **Recommends public financing by the federal government to subsidize a national animal ID and tracking system that will work to protect public health and allow the U.S. to remain competitive in international markets.**

"How to fund a national system for animal identification in the United States is a question that has not been fully resolved," said Slack. "The federal government currently requires identification for a number of regulatory programs. The coordination and consolidation of these programs may provide some funding that is already budgeted." However, Slack says some estimates have suggested that the USAIP will require approximately \$100 million annually to maintain.

"Clearly, the need for traceability of food animals has been punctuated by the recent diagnosis of BSE in the United States," said Slack. "The Secretary's call for immediate implementation is out of concern for consumer protection. NIAA believes that public financing is appropriate to provide tracking of animals and animal products."

"The lack of adequate federal funding will likely continue to impede implementation," he said. "Adequate funding, on the other hand, would allow acceleration of the USAIP timeline."

- **Urges Congress to take action to maintain producer confidentiality and render the information collected through a national tracking system FOIA exempt.**

"It is imperative to achieve full cooperation of animal owners," said Olson, "and that will require that USDA or Congress address producer concerns that USAIP or any other animal tracking system ensure a degree of confidentiality of production records and exemption from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Olson and Slack hope that Congress will embrace USAIP, but acknowledge that certain lawmakers have introduced – with others likely to do so in the coming days – a barrage of legislation concerning animal tracking in the wake of the BSE diagnosis that occurred over the Congressional holiday recess.

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