

New U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Strategy for Establishing a National Animal Identification System (NAIS), Dr. Chuck Lambert, September 28, 2005

- We are grateful for the support we've received for NAIS. The development and implementation of NAIS is truly a Federal-State-industry undertaking.
- Some of the recent attention attracted by the detection of our first domestic case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) has further highlighted the importance of the NAIS that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and State agencies, in cooperation with industry, are developing to help ensure rapid disease containment and maximum protection of America's animals.
- NAIS will help safeguard animal health by establishing an information system to support existing disease control, eradication, surveillance, and monitoring programs. Animal health is the focus and driving factor in the development of NAIS. Timely response to outbreaks of disease is essential to ensuring the protection of the health of U.S. animals.
- The goal of NAIS is to be able to identify all premises that had contact with a foreign animal disease or other disease of concern within 48 hours of discovery. When implemented nationally, NAIS will allow rapid tracing in an outbreak, minimizing scope, expense, and market impact of the outbreak.
- NAIS also provides critical animal identification data that will be integrated into our ongoing disease monitoring and surveillance activities for diseases such as BSE, scrapie, pseudorabies, brucellosis, and others.
- USDA's four guiding principles for NAIS are as follows:
 - The system must be able to allow tracking of animals from point of origin to processing within 48 hours without unnecessary burden to producers and other stakeholders.
 - The system's architecture must be developed without unduly increasing the size and role of government.
 - The system must be flexible enough to utilize existing technologies and incorporate new identification technologies as they are developed.
 - Animal movement data should be maintained in a private system that can be readily accessed when necessary by State and Federal animal health authorities.
- Momentum for the program has been building, especially in recent months as the premises registration component of the program has continued to expand. Over 115,000 premises are currently registered nationwide.
- We are continuing with the development and implementation of the other 2 essential components of NAIS – the animal identification component and the animal tracking component.
- Throughout this process of development and implementation, USDA has been receiving valuable input from stakeholders and from the public. Taking this input into consideration will help us ensure that the fully developed NAIS will be both practical for the stakeholders and will also effectively provide the information necessary for Federal and State animal health officials to protect the health of U.S. animals.

- Based on stakeholder feedback received through a variety of means, including comments received on our draft strategic plan and draft NAIS program standards documents that were published in May, it is clear that industry shares our belief in the many benefits associated with NAIS.
- We were particularly eager to receive feedback on the question of whether animal movement data collection under NAIS should be stored in a Federal or private database. Stakeholder feedback on this question showed support for both options. The majority of producers who responded, however, strongly favored a private database. In fact, 60 percent of the responses from cattle producers favored a private database.
- Although there was a high level of support for the private database from cattle producers, 65 percent of respondents from State Departments of Agriculture or State animal health officials supported a Federal database. In fact, almost half of all the responses received supported a Federal database. We realize that not everyone agrees with the privatization of the animal tracking database, but after taking many issues into consideration, we feel that this is the best workable solution.
- USDA has always viewed development and implementation of NAIS as a government-industry partnership. Our support for a privatized animal tracking database reiterates our commitment and eagerness to work with industry to achieve our shared goals.
- USDA is advocating the creation of a new, independent (legal entity) committee with producer representatives from all species groups and allied industry sectors (e.g., livestock markets, abattoirs, renderers) to develop one workable solution for a privatized animal tracking database. The animal tracking database must be applicable to all species groups and must address the technological needs of all industry sectors. Additionally, the database would need to meet minimum user requirements and system specifications deemed appropriate by State and Federal animal health officials.
- USDA must be able to access a few basic pieces of information that will be reported to the privately-held animal tracking repository: the Animal Identification Number or Group/Lot ID, the premises number of the receiving location, and the date of the animal's or animals' arrival.
- Despite this recent adjustment related to the animal tracking component, the program components for premises and animal ID remain unchanged, and USDA is still on-track to meet the deadlines of the implementation timelines set out in the Draft Strategic Plan, which is available on the NAIS website.
- The animal tracking component of the program is necessary in order to collect animal movement records. The reliability of the 48-hour traceback goal is directly correlated with the completeness of the animal movement records in the NAIS. This is an enormous undertaking as cattle move 3-4 times over the course of their life.

- To be feasible and practical, the collection of animal movement records must be achieved through automated data collection systems. There remains significant concern relative to the capability of current technologies as well as the exorbitant cost of such infrastructure. Therefore, it is imperative that we move forward with the program at the rate in which practical and affordable solutions exist. It is interesting to note, that while the Canadian program became mandatory in 2002, they do not record the movement of their livestock in their database.
- As the nature of the private tracking system takes further shape, USDA will be evaluating the need for confidentiality legislation. Confidentiality of data remains a high priority for USDA, and we will work closely with Congress to ensure adequate protection of producer information as we move forward with NAIS.
- FY 2005 funding for NAIS included \$33 million, and we expect this same level of funding for FY 2006. Continued Federal-State-industry cooperation is critical to the development and implementation of a successful NAIS.
- Additional cooperative agreement applications for field trials and research projects will be available in November; the States and Tribes will administer the agreements.
- For FY 2007, any budget increases would come from money appropriated from other programs.
- The administrative costs for operating an animal tracking database are estimated to be a small percentage of the total cost for implementing NAIS. Accordingly, USDA does not anticipate a significant reduction in budget requirements for the program through privatization of the database.
- We will continue to post updated information about NAIS to the USDA website at www.usda.gov/nais. Again, we are grateful for your support and cooperation as we move forward with NAIS.