

## Animal Health Officials Perspective

Thanks to the organizing committee for this successful ID Expo.

At the 2005 USAHA meeting in Hershey, PA, the Committee on Livestock Identification held an extra daylong session to continue to provide a forum for discussion. A resolution forwarded by the Committee was passed by the Board of Directors calling upon the President of USAHA to meet with the Secretary of Agriculture and encourage him to return the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) to the way it was originally described in the United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP).

Rather than simply deliver the message of the Association, the Executive Committee of USAHA proposed to jointly host with USDA a meeting of selected stakeholders to establish a common direction for the NAIS program. The participants of the meeting would represent a specific stakeholder group, would number only 3 per group and would be selected by their peers in the stakeholder group.

This proposal was offered to Secretary Johanns in January 2006 during the meeting with Dr. Bob Hillman, Chair of the Committee on Livestock Identification, and me. The Secretary later agreed to such a meeting provided it wasn't an initiative to take the NAIS back to what was once proposed through USAIP. Instead, the Secretary asked that we use the meeting to propose specific actions to move the program forward. The ID Expo meeting in Kansas City and the USAHA meeting in Minneapolis will form the foundation for this special meeting. We appreciate the Secretary's careful consideration of the proposal, and we look forward to planning the meeting.

At this ID Expo we are doing what Booker T. Washington encouraged us to do.

"Do a common thing in an uncommon way."

The "common thing" is animal identification. We know how to brand, backtag, eartag, ear notch, tattoo and microchip.

The "uncommon way" is represented by the three components of the NAIS. We wanted to:

1. Have a universally recognizable identification,
2. Be able to link an animal to a piece of "dirt" somewhere in the country, (ranch, parcel, farm, section) and
3. Determine the movements of an animal within 48 hours.

But these are just the mechanical pieces to what we really want and need. We have done all of this for one purpose and one purpose only. It is to protect and preserve the agricultural assets of the country.

Particularly since 9/11, we are aware of people who would choose to destroy what we have in this country. Agriculture and Food are listed as one of the Critical Infrastructures of the Country. We know that agriculture has dramatically changed, and some portions are almost unrecognizable which is all the more reason to be prepared. The NAIS provides the tool that has been lacking in every tabletop exercise conducted in every state in the Nation. We must know where the animals are before an event or we will certainly fail in our attempts to contain a disease.

Although there will be attempts to make the NAIS into something it wasn't intended to be, we must pursue the common goal to protect and preserve the agricultural assets of the country.

I am confident the NAIS will survive and thrive despite all of the obstacles placed before it because of its roots. It didn't start in the halls of Congress. It didn't start in the committee rooms in State Legislatures. It started here with producers, veterinarians, state and federal animal health officials, academicians and technology providers. Over 70 organizations and hundreds of individuals have contributed to this process, and they all came to the same conclusion...the status quo will not sustain us. It will not protect and preserve the agricultural assets of the country.

So when we meet again at the next Animal Identification meeting, and surely we shall, we must not forget the ultimate goal of this initiative. We must be prepared to respond this time, the next time, every time.

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