



**Testimony by
Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund –
United Stockgrowers of America
(R-CALF USA)**

**Presented by
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Beaumont, TX**

**USDA's Hearing Regarding the Privatization of
Animal Movement Tracking
Database**

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Good morning, I'm Chuck Kiker, a producer from Beaumont, Texas and president-elect of R-CALF USA. I appreciate the opportunity to be here and participate in this meeting.

R-CALF USA has attended meetings and participated in the evolution of the NAIS. At our past convention, upon careful review of the NAIS strategic plan and many unanswered questions, our membership overwhelmingly voted to oppose any sort of mandatory animal I.D. system and we have requested a cost-benefit analysis of the NAIS for the beef industry. To date no cost-benefit analysis has been done and no detailed estimates have been released on exactly how much the NAIS is actually going to cost producers.

Now, Secretary Johanns has announced that USDA feels the animal tracking component of the NAIS should be privatized to strengthen our industry-government partnership. Supposedly, private industry needed to control this facet of the NAIS to protect producer's private information from the Freedom of Information Act. The USDA has used the issue of protecting producer's personal records as an excuse to strap the cost of an expensive government animal health and food safety program on the backs of U.S. cattle producers through a privatized system.

Through the entire brucellosis eradication program, with whole cattle herds being tagged and records kept on them by state animal health officials, protecting ranchers sensitive, personal information was never a big concern or problem. When

disaster programs were implemented for cattle producers due to drought, volumes of personal information concerning individual's cattle operations were taken in by FSA offices throughout the U.S. and protecting that information was never an issue. Last, when a BSE infected cow was discovered in a Texas cattle herd, the rancher's privacy was never compromised and very few people even knew what county the cow came from for sure.

NAIS is an animal health and food safety issue. We already have agencies set up to administer animal health and safety programs with a proven track record, including animal trace back. State animal health commissions and state veterinarians have been responsible for identifying animals and tracking animal diseases for decades and have done a pretty good job. An animal identification system intended to achieve the health and safety goals of APHIS should remain under the direct control of those agency's that have a statutory responsibility to maintain the health and welfare of the U.S. cattle industry. Only APHIS, state animal health commissions, and tribal governments have this statutory responsibility and only these agencies are accountable to the public. The USDA should not outsource the most critical component of an animal ID system – the information needed to conduct a 48-hour trace back.

The U.S. cattle industry has not been provided with a cost benefit analysis of the animal ID system APHIS is proposing. As a representative of U.S. cattle producers, it would be fiscally irresponsible to support any movement on this issue until we have the cost information needed to determine if a national program is financially feasible to our \$47 billion industry. Even for today's discussion, one of the most critical pieces of information needed to make an informed decision is what is the difference in cost between a program administered under the existing infrastructures maintained by APHIS, state animal health commissions and tribal governments versus a program administered by a private consortium that must first build a new infrastructure?

We also need to look at what USDA is attempting to do from a long term perspective. In the event of a future disease outbreak and a failure of the proposed system to achieve a timely trace back, who is responsible? Who is accountable? Who is liable? We must know the answers to these questions before we proceed. Under a system administered and operated by APHIS, state animal health commissions, and tribal governments, we know the answers to these questions. Under APHIS's current proposal, these questions are unanswered.

We were under the impression that USDA had a database set up and had the ability to track animal movement. Why don't you see if it works? Let us see some results from the pilot projects, do a cost-benefit analysis, and let's see what this is going to do to the industry financially. Thank you.

