



NAIS and the Equine Owner

Op-Ed by R-CALF USA President/Region VI Director Max Thornsberry

Note: R-CALF USA Region VI includes the states of Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Oklahoma. Thornsberry also is a veterinarian who chairs the group's animal health committee.

Everyone knows that many successful cattle operations rely upon the dedicated loyalty of a well-trained cow horse that can anticipate exactly what to do at the appropriate moment to accomplish the task at hand. R-CALF USA, as a trade association for independent U.S. cattle producers, recognizes this fact, and as such, not only do we oppose the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) overall as a violation of each citizen's constitutional rights, but we oppose NAIS because of its invasive requirements to demand the reporting of each and every movement of our horses, whether such movement is across the county line, to another pasture, or down the road to a roping, show or rodeo.

Horse owners should know why the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is being forced on their industry. The U.S. signed a World Trade Organization (WTO) treaty and is now submitting to global rules on animal trade established by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). The OIE wants the U.S. to accept imports from countries where animal disease problems persist. For example, while the U.S. eradicated Equine Piroplasmiasis – a tick-borne protozoal infection, the OIE wants the U.S. to accept imports from countries that have not eradicated this disease. With NAIS, horse movements could be traced from birth to death, thus eliminating the need to disallow high-risk imports because, according to the OIE, the U.S. could manage contagious diseases within its borders.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is not following its mandate to prevent the introduction of foreign animal diseases. Instead, USDA spent over \$100 million to entice livestock owners to register their property in an NAIS database and obtain a "free" NAIS Premises Identification Number (PIN). Most equine owners and cattle owners have refused to register for this internationally sanctioned encumbrance to their private property. USDA says a PIN is needed to identify all livestock owners' property so it can trace the movement of animals in the event of a disease outbreak.

Yet, in Missouri, and I am sure in most states, a 9-1-1 call will bring emergency officials to your doorstep in minutes. At USDA offices, you can obtain your farm description, including an aerial photograph. On Google Earth you can obtain a satellite photograph of sufficient detail to count the horses in your pasture – and USDA says it cannot find your farm following a disease outbreak?

The reason USDA wants you to register under NAIS has nothing to do with its ability to find your farm. Instead, when asked why USDA was pushing so hard for NAIS, former USDA Under Secretary Bruce Knight, in September 2007, told a large group of bovine practitioners at our annual meeting in Vancouver, Canada: "It is quite simple. We want to be in compliance with OIE regulations by 2010."

USDA told Congress that NAIS would have to be electronic to function properly. This means brands, tattoos, or individual color markings or descriptions would be unsuitable. The only acceptable means of electronically identifying equines is a surgically implanted, glass enclosed electronic microchip. This process is not as simple as some believe. When implanting a chip into a horse, I clip or shave the area, scrub it with surgical preparation soap and spray it with surgical site disinfectant. I then inject the area over the implant site with lidocaine to numb the skin and underlying tissues. To maintain sterility of the chips, I surgically scrub my hands and don surgical gloves. Only after this preparation do I implant the chip in the nuchal ligament of the mid-neck area of my equine patient.

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The glass-enclosed chips do not always stay put. Like a splinter in your finger, the body often mounts a response to a foreign object, even one as innocuous as a piece of sterile glass. The response may include the formation of a sterile abscess around the chip, or it may remain painful and generate a negative response when the horse turns its neck. Chips are known to migrate within the body, and finding a chip in some animals becomes a major undertaking. A small percentage of veterinary patients have developed a cancerous growth at the site of implantation. While the incidence is low in animals with short lives, an equine patient has more time to develop a cancerous growth around the implanted chip.

I don't know about all equine owners, but most cattle producers do not appreciate an international agency telling us what we can and cannot do with our livestock in the United States. The U.S. has spent untold millions of dollars to eradicate many serious contagious animal diseases. Why would we now expose our privately owned animals to contagious animal diseases just to give away access to our marketplace to animals and meat from countries that chose not to invest in resources to control and eradicate diseases within their country?

We live in the United States, not the WTO. We have a Constitution that directs our legal system, not the OIE. We have a government by the people, for the people, and of the people. It is time for the people to stand up and say, "Enough with this one world government!"

Unless equine owners join with other livestock producers to oppose this nonsense, NAIS will become mandatory in the United States. It will cost equine owners in excess of \$50/head to implant the electronic microchip. You will then be required to report any movement of your horses when they leave your property for any reason. A study released by USDA the last week of April 2009 and completed by Kansas State University shows that the annual cost of identifying horses individually with microchips is \$75.51 per horse. You can see my estimate of \$50+/head is considerably lower than what this recent study shows.

Imagine the bureaucratic nightmare and paperwork requirements of reporting to your government every time you go on a trail ride, go to a show or event, or trailer your mare to a stud. There would have to be an NAIS office in every county seat to process all this data, keep track of your information and report any violations to USDA. Just imagine the fines and enforcement actions that equine and other livestock owners would be subject to right here in the United States of America.