

R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America

"Fighting for the U.S. Cattle Producer"

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Contact: Shae Dodson, Communications Coordinator
Phone: 406-672-8969; e-mail: sdodson@r-calfusa.com

Group Encourages Producers to Offer Solutions at NAIS Listening Sessions

Billings, Mont. – R-CALF USA encourages U.S. cattle producers to take full advantage of the seven U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) listening sessions scheduled by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to hear producers' concerns for the proposed National Animal Identification System (NAIS) as well as to hear producers' solutions for enhancing animal disease traceability.

"R-CALF believes the proposed NAIS is fundamentally flawed and represents a backward step in U.S. animal disease control and eradication efforts," said R-CALF USA President/VI Director Max Thornsberry, a Missouri veterinarian. "Further, we believe the NAIS is an invasive and onerous regulatory regime that would violate the rights and privileges of hundreds of thousands of U.S. cattle producers."

In congressional testimony and comments, R-CALF USA has explained that the components of the NAIS proposal are fundamentally flawed: 1) the NAIS improperly relies on the registration and identification of property through premises registration rather than relying upon the identification of the state and local veterinarians and the livestock owner – the people who maintain the records and information needed to conduct a disease investigation; 2) the NAIS eartag numbering system is designed to differentiate cattle in the international marketplace and is not designed to aid in domestic disease traceback; 3) the NAIS requirement of reporting each animal's movements throughout their lifetimes would result in the duplication of preexisting tracking data, including brand inspection papers, interstate health certificates and purchasing invoices. In addition, the movement reporting requirement represents an unnecessary encumbrance on domestic commerce that would require the establishment of an entirely new and extremely costly government bureaucracy to administer.

"We encourage U.S. producers to participate in the upcoming listening sessions and to focus on common sense and practical solutions to our nation's legitimate need to enhance disease traceability without infringing on the rights and privileges of U.S. cattle producers," Thornsberry emphasized.

R-CALF USA provided USDA a blueprint for such a solution and encourages producers to adopt the recommendations in whole or in part when making their presentations to the Secretary. Central to R-CALF USA's blueprint for enhancing disease traceability is the restoration and expansion of the highly successful, and time proven, U.S. brucellosis-type identification system:

Specific to enhancing animal disease traceback, R-CALF USA's plan recommends the following:

1. Adopt the surveillance and identification components of the preexisting brucellosis program, including the metal eartag and tattoo that identifies the state-of-origin and the local veterinarian who applied the identification devices, and require breeding stock not otherwise identified through breed registries to be identified at the first point of ownership transfer.
2. State and Tribal animal health officials should be solely responsible for maintaining a statewide database for all metal tags applied within their respective jurisdictions and should continue to use the mailing address and/or the production unit identifier determined appropriate by the attending veterinarian to achieve traceback to the herd of origin should a disease event occur. Under no circumstances should the Federal government maintain a national registry of U.S. livestock or require the national registration of producers' real property.
3. The federal government should enter into agreements with State and Tribal animal health officials to pay for the States' and Tribal governments' costs of identifying breeding stock and maintaining the State and Tribal databases, as well as

bolstering disease surveillance at livestock collection points such as livestock auction yards and slaughtering plants, including increased surveillance for BSE.

4. The federal government should coordinate with the States and Tribes to establish electronic interface standards and to establish improved communication protocols so it can more effectively coordinate with the States and Tribes in the event of a disease outbreak.
5. The federal government should coordinate with the States and Tribes to establish improved protocols for the retention and searchability of State and Tribal health certificates, brand inspection documents and other documents used to facilitate interstate movement of livestock.
6. Establish specific disease programs and focus increased resources toward the eradication of diseased wildlife in States where wildlife populations are known to harbor communicable diseases.

R-CALF USA's plan also includes measures to bolster the U.S.'s resistance to the introduction of foreign animal diseases and to improve food safety:

7. Prevent the importation of serious cattle diseases and pests from foreign sources by:
 - a. Prohibiting the importation of livestock from any country that experiences outbreaks of serious diseases.
 - b. Requiring all imported livestock to be permanently identified.
 - c. Requiring all livestock imported into the United States to meet health and safety standards *identical* to those established for the United States.
 - d. Requiring TB testing and quarantine of all imported Mexican cattle.
 - e. Reversing USDA's efforts to carve out regions within disease-affected foreign countries in order to facilitate imports from the affected country before the disease of concern is fully controlled or eradicated.
 - f. Increasing the testing of all imported meat and bone meal to prohibit contaminated feed from entering the United States.
8. To address the challenge of increased incidences of tainted meat products, Congress and USDA must substantially reform the current hands-off inspection system known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP). HACCP has fundamentally failed to ensure adequate sanitary practices at major slaughterhouse establishments.

The USDA listening sessions will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. local time, with registration one hour prior to each meeting. USDA has not yet announced the exact locations of the listening sessions within each city. The meetings will be held in the following locations:

Thursday, May 14: Harrisburg, Pa.
Monday, May 18: Pasco, Wash.
Wednesday, May 20: Austin, Texas
Thursday, May 21: Birmingham, Ala.
Friday, May 22: Louisville, Ky.
Wednesday, May 27: Storrs, Conn.
Monday, June 1: Greeley, Colo.

R-CALF USA is hopeful that USDA will later schedule additional listening sessions in regions with high populations of full-time cattle farmers and ranchers who would be most affected by changes to U.S. animal disease control and eradication strategies.

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R-CALF USA (Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America) is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the continued profitability and viability of the U.S. cattle industry. R-CALF USA represents thousands of U.S. cattle producers on trade and marketing issues. Members are located across 47 states and are primarily cow/calf operators, cattle backgrounders, and/or feedlot owners. R-CALF USA directors and committee chairs are extremely active unpaid volunteers. R-CALF USA has dozens of affiliate organizations and various main-street businesses are associate members. For more information, visit www.r-calfusa.com or, call 406-252-2516.

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