



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

FEB 23 2009

Dr. R. M. Thornsberry
President, R-CALF USA Board of Directors
R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
Post Office Box 30715
Billings, Montana 59107

Dear Dr. Thornsberry:

Thank you for your letter of December 5, 2008, to former Secretary Edward T. Schafer regarding the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) animal health authorities, our efforts to improve animal health programs, and, in particular, the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

We certainly appreciate the opportunity to respond. USDA's statutory authority to develop and implement NAIS is critical to our mission to protect the Nation's agricultural resources and is granted to the Secretary of Agriculture by the Animal Health Protection Act (AHPA) of 2002. As you know, the AHPA, among other things, authorizes USDA to carry out operations and measures to detect, control, or eradicate livestock pests or diseases from or within the United States. The AHPA gives USDA broad authority to regulate animal imports and exports, to regulate the interstate movement of animals, and to cooperate with the States and others to protect animal health. Animal health officials in the United States and around the world have long recognized that an efficient and effective system for the identification of premises affected or potentially affected by livestock diseases is an essential component of any animal health program.

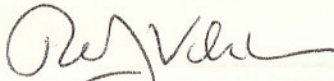
Independent of and prior to NAIS, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and State animal health officials routinely assigned premises identification numbers in the normal course of their animal health program activities for decades. For example, as you know, premises information has been used to support the eradication of brucellosis and tuberculosis in cattle. This premises identification information is essential to safeguarding animal health, and particularly important in providing first responders with the information necessary to determine and delimit the size and scope of a disease event.

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With regard to premises identification under our current animal health programs and under NAIS, we know of no potential impact with respect to the real property interests you reference in your letter.

We hope this information is helpful. Again, thank you very much for your continued interest in this and other issues related to the health of the Nation's agriculture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary