

FAX SHEET

RUSH

Total # of Pages: 3TO: *Mr. R. M. Thorpeberry*Subject/
Remarks

*- NAIS**- Original response will
follow in mail.
Thank S*

- PLS. DO NOT FAX BACK INCOMING -

From: Colleen Yates
Correspondence Control Assistant

Date: APR 14 2009

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Legislative & Public Affairs
4700 River Road, Unit 49
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United States
Department of
Agriculture

APR 14 2009

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW

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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 letters of March 17 and April 2, 2009, to Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack regarding the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

We are pleased that you have accepted the invitation to meet with Secretary Vilsack on April 15, 2009, to discuss this issue. As we have previously indicated, we believe it is critically important to the health of the Nation's agricultural animals for the United States to have an efficient system of animal identification in place. With reference to your inquiry about our authority to mandate NAIS, USDA is authorized to carry out operations and measures to protect the health of American agriculture by the Animal Health Protection Act of 2002. We believe that NAIS is essential in carrying out these responsibilities. As you know, the Secretary has committed to careful review of all issues and all best practices to deal with disease identification, control, and eradication.

With regard to your contention that USDA officials have not been involved in the administration of the official brucellosis and tuberculosis programs, we must clarify that these activities are carried out by USDA-accredited veterinarians who perform such programs on behalf of our Agency. In accordance with title 9, sections 78.1 and 161.1(a) of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, they are acting in the capacity of Federal animal health officials in carrying out those duties as part of cooperative State-Federal disease control and eradication programs. In the past, although USDA-accredited veterinarians did not record or issue a premises identification number on disease program forms, a location identification number was assigned in USDA's database once the paperwork was submitted and processed by our Agency's Veterinary Services area offices. Premises identification information allows USDA officials to associate disease program records with the animals residing at a specific premises. This is of critical importance to ensure that animal health officials can respond effectively to animal health emergencies and conduct effective traceback activities.



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Dr. R. M. Thornberry
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While this information was previously collected, each program was administered separately with its own set of data standards and definitions for location identifiers, resulting in multiple identifiers for some locations. Because the programs' information systems were incompatible and could not be integrated, traceability was negatively affected. As we have previously indicated, NAIS allows our Agency to standardize location identifiers, which is an important step to improving traceability and allowing for rapid disease response in the United States.

With reference to the detailed recommendations you provided, we appreciate you sharing Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund United Stockgrowers of America's specific concerns and suggestions for an alternative course. We value your input and the input of all stakeholders, as we feel that our decisionmaking process benefits from a variety of perspectives. We assure you that the Secretary is committed to reviewing all best practices to deal with animal health issues, including the interrelationship between such issues in the United States and the effects of foreign disease issues on our Agency's decisions to permit trade pursuant to regionalization and compartmentalization policies. The Secretary looks forward to the opportunity to discuss these and other NAIS issues with you during the upcoming meeting.

With regard to your concern about the challenge presented by tainted meat products, the Food Safety and Inspection Service is the USDA agency responsible for ensuring that meat and poultry intended for human consumption is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. For your convenience, we are forwarding a copy of your letters to that agency for review.

We assure you that USDA takes very seriously the concerns of all its stakeholders, and remains committed to the preservation of U.S. animal agricultural health.

Sincerely,



Kevin Shea
Acting Administrator