September 10, 2009

Re: 2010 Agriculture Appropriations bill and the National Animal Identification System

To the Honorable Members of the Agriculture Appropriations Conference Committee:

The undersigned organizations urge you to adopt the House version of the 2010 Agriculture Appropriations bill with respect to the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), eliminating the funding for NAIS. Contrary to its stated purposes, NAIS will not address animal disease or food safety problems. Instead, NAIS imposes high costs and paperwork burdens on family farmers and creates incentives for CAFOs and vertically integrated systems. This ill-conceived and badly implemented program should not receive any federal funding, and we urge the conference committee to adopt the House version of the bill on this issue.

USDA’s plans for NAIS describe a far-reaching three-step program that calls for every person who owns even one livestock or poultry animal to register their property, tag each animal when it leaves the property it was born on, and report a long list of movements to a database within 24 hours. The provisions would apply whether or not that animal is used for commercial purposes. NAIS would directly impact millions of animal owners. Group or lot identification would only be allowed where animals are managed as a group from birth to death and never commingled with animals outside of their production system. In practice, group identification would apply mainly, if not entirely, to confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and vertically integrated operations.

Our organizations have sent previous letters outlining the many problems with NAIS. In this letter, we will touch on just a few of the reasons that NAIS is fundamentally flawed:

1) **No analysis or quantification of the alleged benefits.** USDA has made unsupported assertions that our country needs 48-hour traceback of all animal movements for disease control. Yet USDA has failed to provide any scientific basis, including risk analysis or scientific review of existing programs, to support this claim. USDA has also asserted that NAIS would provide 48-hour traceback, but has failed to address the many technological and practical barriers. Existing disease control programs, combined with measures such as brand registries and normal private record-keeping, provide cost-effective traceback. A new and costly program such as NAIS is unnecessary and potentially counterproductive.

2) **High costs.** The costs of complying with NAIS will be unreasonably burdensome for small farmers and many other animal owners. The costs of NAIS go far beyond the tag itself, and include: premises registration database creation and updates; tags and related equipment, such as readers, computers, and software; 24-hour reporting requirements, imposing extensive paperwork burdens; labor for every stage of the program; stress on the animals; qualitative costs, from loss of religious freedoms, privacy, and trust in government; and enforcement.

3) **No food safety benefits.** NAIS will not prevent foodborne illnesses from *e. coli* or salmonella, because the contamination occurs at the slaughterhouse, while NAIS tracking ends at the time of slaughter. Thus, NAIS will neither prevent the contamination nor increase the government’s ability to track contaminated meat back to its source. In addition, NAIS will hurt efforts to develop safer, decentralized local food systems.

4) **Unfair burdens placed on family farms and sustainable livestock operations.** NAIS would also impose significant reporting and paperwork burdens on small farms. In addition, sustainable livestock operations that manage animals on pasture would face higher rates of tag losses than confinement operations, due to animals getting their tags caught on brush or fences. NAIS essentially creates incentives for CAFOs, with the accompanying social and environmental concerns.
For these reasons, we strongly urge you to adopt the House position and eliminate funding for NAIS in the 2010 Appropriations bill. We thank you for your consideration.

For more information, contact Judith McGeary at 512-484-8821 (cell), or Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org