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Farm, Ranch, and Citizens Coalition Criticizes Animal Identification as a Red Herring For Food Safety

Livestock Identification Fails to Protect Consumers but Endangers Family Farms

WASHINGTON – Fifty-five groups from across the country sent a letter yesterday to key Congressional Committees asking them to halt funding for the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) and to keep it separate from food safety reforms.

The recent highly publicized failures in America's food safety system, from the slaughter of downer cattle in California to the inconclusive hunt for salmonella-laced tomatoes, have created a public outcry. Some advocates and legislators want to include the proposed National Animal Identification System (NAIS) as a mandatory part of food safety reforms. NAIS is a controversial three-step program that calls for registering, tagging, and tracking every livestock and poultry animal in the country, whether or not the animal is kept for food.

“The giant meatpackers are diverting attention from the real reasons for the recurring food scandals, by pushing a feel-good tracking program that will protect their profits without improving the safety of their meat products,” said Judith McGeary, executive director of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, one of the signatories to the letter.

The NAIS would track livestock and poultry animals from birth to death, ending at the slaughterhouse. According to the Centers for Disease Control, most foodborne illnesses are the result of contamination at the slaughterhouse or during food processing and handling.

“The problems in our food supply stem from factory farm practices and the consolidation of our food industry, so that a problem in one large processing plant can make people all over the country sick.” says Taaron Meikle, President of the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, another signatory. “We need to stop turning to false solutions offered by the industry, and support local, sustainable farms that provide safe and healthy foods for our communities.”

The NAIS would impose significant regulatory compliance costs on small livestock producers, lacks a sound scientific basis for combating foodborne illness or animal disease, and infringes on the privacy rights of farmers that are not raising livestock for integrated meatpackers and processors. Among other things, the NAIS plans would allow vertically integrated factory farms that manage animals as a group from birth to death to identify thousands of animals as one group, while most independent family farms would have to individually identify each animal when they leave their birthplace.

“The NAIS favors vertically integrated farms and factory confinement farms that will be able to use group identification and avoid the cost imposed on family farms,” says Debbie Davis, a

Texas rancher and a director of the Cattlemen's Texas Longhorn Registry. "We'll essentially be penalized for raising our animals on pasture in sustainable systems as independent producers."

The organizations' letter concludes: "For these reasons, we strongly urge you to exclude the NAIS from any food safety bill and to stop all funding for the program. Additional background information on why the NAIS is a flawed system to address food safety is attached."

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Note to Editors: A copy of the letter is available at
www.farmandranchfreedom.org/content/letter_080917

About the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance: FARFA is dedicated to representing non-corporate agriculture and animal owners, from homesteaders to horse owners to full-time ranchers. FARFA's work also serves those who are local foods consumer and people who care about protecting our traditional way of life.