

Below is a sample letter.
Personalize your letter – tell them how you will be affected!

To find your elected officials, go to Project Vote Smart at
<http://www.vote-smart.org/index.htm>

Dear _____:

I am a _____ (small farmer, consumer of local foods, horse owner, property owner...)

I oppose the implementation of a national animal identification system (NAIS), both nationally and in our state. While the USDA has announced that the program is voluntary at the federal level, it is continuing to provide grants to the states to implement NAIS. Specifically, USDA is funding **mandatory** implementation in several states. Further, the USDA's stated goal is to have 100% participation by 2009, and the cooperative agreements with states are conditioned on reaching specific goals. In other words, the agency intends to **require every person who owns animals** to comply with this burdensome program, acting indirectly through state programs. **{Insert whatever your state status is – check with your Agriculture Department, and ask if they are even considering having a mandatory program in the future}**

The USDA's plan for NAIS would require the following:

1. Premises Registration: Every person who owns or manages locations where livestock or poultry are handled will have to register in a government database, or a private database that the government can access. (The USDA's latest document notes that premises registration can be achieved by making it a prerequisite to existing non-NAIS programs.)
2. Animal Identification: Every animal will be assigned a unique 15-digit number when they are moved from their herd of origin or are commingled with other animals. Each animal will need to be permanently identified. For most species, the proposal is to require radio frequency identification tags or microchips, rather than the less expensive, traditional forms of physical tagging. While the agencies claim that poultry and swine will get "group numbers," most small farmers and companion-animal owners do not keep animals in ways that would qualify.
3. Animal Tracking: The owner must report, within 24 hours, every time an animal is tagged or a tag is lost; every death or slaughter; every missing animal; and "commingling" events, including public and private sales, shows, and exhibitions.

You can find this information in the documents published by the USDA in the Federal Register in 2005. The USDA also released an Implementation Plan in April 2006 and a Users Guide in November 2006, which are available at www.usda.gov/nais.

Never before in the history of our country has a person had to report to the state simply because he or she owns animals. NAIS represent an unprecedented expansion of the government bureaucracy into people's private lives and infringes on our property and privacy rights. NAIS will impose heavy burdens on livestock owners, driving many small and medium-size farmers and ranchers out of business. These burdens will also discourage people from owning livestock, such as horses, as companion animals. This in turn will drive related businesses, such as feed stores, slaughterhouses, and auction barns, out of business. The economic effects will be wide-reaching.

The stated reason for NAIS, disease tracking, is both insufficient and unfounded. Fears of disease cannot justify every possible intrusion into people's lives. Moreover, the government and private industry already have in place existing programs and systems that are sufficient to track disease. In addition, NAIS fails to address the significant differences among different types of premises, and the risks of creating a black market in livestock ownership. Disease must be addressed on a species-specific basis, with an understanding of the causes of the different diseases and the ways the diseases are transmitted. A one-size-fits-all program is useless. And tracking disease 48 hours after the fact will do nothing to prevent disease in the first place.

Moreover, NAIS will not increase the safety of our food supply. Most food-borne illnesses are from organisms that contaminate food due to poor practices at slaughterhouses or in food handling and preparation. NAIS will do nothing to protect against these problems. Moreover, the tracking ends at the time of slaughter, so it will not add to the government's ability to trace contaminated meats once they are in the food supply chain.

As far as concerns about terrorism, NAIS is counterproductive. The databases will provide easy targets for hackers, allowing them to find every single location where anyone owns animals. Terrorists could simply infect the radio frequency tags with viruses, or destroy the microchips, preventing any traceback on the infected animals. The recommended type of microchips, ISO 11784/85, is designed to be reprogrammable; any terrorist or thief could easily circumvent the system. This program will only burden those who are law-abiding citizens.

Rather than protecting us from disease, NAIS will increase the consolidation of our food supply into the hands of large companies who are willing and able to accept the financial burdens, and the government intrusion of NAIS. This will make us *more* vulnerable, not less, to the spread of disease and disruptions in food supply, whether from natural disasters or terrorism. NAIS will raise the price of food and create a massive government bureaucracy at the expense of every taxpayer. The only winners in this program are the microchip manufacturers, the associations that will manage the databases, and the government employees.

I request that you support legislation that would prevent this program from being established in our state, or, at a minimum, limit the state agency's authority to a purely voluntary program that protects animal owners against any coercion to enroll in the program and that is funded by the participants and not the government.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Town, USA