

To National Animal Identification System Stakeholders:

On October 16, 2005, we convened a stakeholder meeting in Kansas City, MO, to provide you with information—as well as hear your thoughts—regarding the planned animal movement tracking database under the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). As you know, in August, 2005, United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced that under the NAIS, animal movement tracking information would be collected and held in a database designed by our animal industry partners. This decision was in keeping with USDA's commitment that the NAIS be a true Federal-State-industry partnership.

In delivering my remarks during the stakeholder meeting, I stressed that it was our preference that the various animal industry groups come together to form a legal entity responsible for designing and implementing a single animal movement tracking database. I then went on to say that USDA would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the consortium outlining the specifics of the partnership, as well as our requirements for the database—namely reliability; no user fees for State or Federal access to the database; and uninterrupted access to the system.

We benefited greatly from the ensuing discussion with you, especially regarding your questions and comments on the potential for there to be several different animal tracking databases, perhaps for each animal industry group. In response, I said that USDA would remain open to weighing such options.

Since the stakeholder meeting, my staff and I have been looking closely at the issue of multiple animal movement tracking databases. It remains our goal as well to ensure that the privatization of the animal movement tracking database progresses in as timely a manner as possible.

Therefore, regarding the animal movement tracking component of NAIS, we are now proposing a metadata repository that USDA would develop and maintain; this potentially will allow us to work with multiple databases collecting information on animal movement. In very basic terms, metadata is an information technology solution that stores data about data.

This solution, referenced at the public meeting as a “single portal” option, could very well provide an effective means for USDA's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to send queries for animal movement records only to those databases that have information on a subject animal or animals. This enhances the efficiency of any potential animal disease investigation. Additionally, it would provide a single format, as well as technology standard requirements, helping APHIS interface or communicate with the participating database systems. We will thoroughly evaluate the metadata technology solution prior to any actual development.

As we make progress in finalizing the solution and developing the system requirements, we will begin evaluating the animal movement tracking databases of organizations wanting to participate in the NAIS. The process will involve confirming that the defined data elements are compliant with the NAIS standards; that the technology architecture meets the technical requirements; and that the proposed databases submitted to us for review meet the other criteria we have set. Then, if all is in order, we would initiate a formal agreement (rather than a single MOU) with each entity responsible for the databases. The agreement would also detail access rights, as well as safeguards for preserving historic data if the organization discontinues operation of the database or ceases business. If and when the agreement is finalized, those databases would be noted as authorized or compliant animal tracking systems in the NAIS.

I recently outlined these developments as part of the remarks that I delivered during the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual meeting conference in Nashville, TN, in early January. This update was warmly received by the Farm Bureau, and I hope that you view it as a positive step, as well.

As I have said from the outset, development of an effective NAIS requires the continued partnership of USDA, the States, and industry. We remain open and receptive to all proposals, which will move development of the NAIS forward as expeditiously as possible. I, and my staff are committed to working with you to make the NAIS as effective as possible, and have the system in place in this country as soon as possible.

Thank you for your continued interest and efforts in this regard. Do not hesitate to contact me or Neil Hammerschmidt, our NAIS coordinator, should you have any questions or need any additional information at this time. Our NAIS Web site, <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>, contains much more information as well.

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