



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

AUG 3 2010

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2362A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

The conference report accompanying the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010, requested a “complete and detailed strategic plan for the [animal disease traceability] program, including tangible outcomes, measurable goals, specific milestones, and necessary resources for the entire program.” I am writing to inform the Committee about the status as requested.

To develop a more comprehensive understanding of how to design and deliver an animal disease traceability program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) gathered input from the public through a variety of mechanisms (15 listening sessions, formally announced public comment periods, focus groups, and ongoing stakeholder input). USDA evaluated alternatives for building an effective animal disease traceability capacity while developing our new framework and learned from mistakes made in trying to implement the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). One of the perceived pitfalls of NAIS was rigidity. The United States has the largest, most diverse livestock industry in the world. Many American producers felt NAIS was a top-down, one-size-fits-all solution that did not meet their needs, which impacted their participation.

Accordingly, on February 5, 2010, I announced that USDA is setting a new course for animal disease traceability that empowers the States, Tribal Nations, and producers to find and use the approaches that work best for them while meeting national disease traceability performance standards. This new course will respond to the concerns expressed by producers and respect the wishes of those who have supported USDA’s past traceability efforts. This new framework will be realistic, achievable, and flexible. The system requires that certain populations of animals be traceable, but allows States and Tribal Nations the freedom and flexibility to determine how best to achieve our goals and meet Federal standards. The incremental approach we envision stresses the basics of animal disease traceability, builds on past successes, and lays the groundwork for substantial traceability gains moving forward.

The framework calls for USDA to collaborate with States and Tribes to establish performance measures and timelines, and through a transparent rulemaking process, solicit public comment on the new requirements. In late March 2010, USDA convened a forum with animal health leaders of the States and Tribal Nations to establish ways of achieving the objectives of the new traceability plan.

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro

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USDA followed this forum by hosting three public meetings in May with industry stakeholders to obtain feedback on the approaches that were discussed regarding the regulatory framework. In addition, a Traceability Regulation Working Group with representatives from the Federal Government, States, and Tribes will provide input to help USDA develop a rule that we plan to publish next year. The rule will propose to require livestock moving interstate to be officially identified, unless exempt, and establish general parameters for the traceability performance standards. Following the final rule being published, the detailed traceability performance measurements will be published in a separate document that will be referenced in the regulation and available online. This document will contain the details of the program, including timelines, thus providing the equivalent of a strategic plan document.

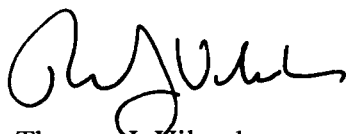
The formation of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health is a priority as we move forward with the development of a traceability framework; a committee composed of diverse members with broad animal health expertise will be able to provide advice and guidance as we implement the new approach. Notice of the formation of the committee and a call for nominations was published in the Federal Register on June 17 (nominations to be accepted for 45 days thereafter). I anticipate that the committee will be able to begin providing recommendations on animal health issues (including traceability) as early as this Fall.

Animal disease traceability is a cornerstone of USDA's animal disease control activities. While prevention is our priority, an effective response system must be in place in the event of a disease outbreak; the potential emergence of highly contagious diseases makes that need all the more urgent. USDA's new framework closes gaps in our ability to trace potentially sick animals and builds on our progress in this area. For example, USDA will use and make available to States and Tribes the information technology infrastructure that we have developed to support our traceability efforts to date. Due largely to the focus on animals moving interstate that present a higher risk of disease spread and the use of low-cost tags for identifying animals, the new system is expected to impose less of a cost on producers than NAIS.

Concentrating our efforts on animals moving interstate will ensure that limited resources are focused on populations most likely to spread disease; that we can trace back disease events quickly; and that necessary information is available to animal health officials. USDA will also develop compliance and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that States and Tribes are meeting national performance standards. As States and Tribes establish systems that meet Federal performance standards, USDA will set in motion a results-focused process for achieving the animal disease traceability system that American producers need and want.

If you have any questions about this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am sending a similar letter to Congressman Kingston, and Senators Kohl and Brownback.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary



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The Honorable Jack Kingston
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Kingston:

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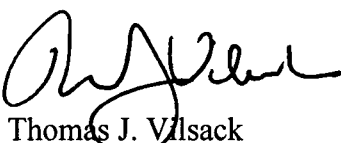
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Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6026

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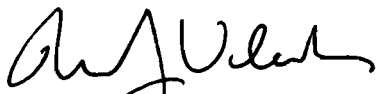
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Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
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Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
190 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-4403

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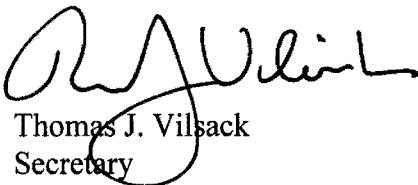
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