



A Deeper Look: USDA's Animal Traceability Framework

USDA says the NAIS is out and an improved animal-disease traceability system is in the works.

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Courtesy USDA/ Scott Bauer

The USDA's new animal-disease traceability system will not require livestock to be tracked unless they cross state lines. Small farmers can give input on the new system in March 2010. Due to feedback from the USDA's listening tour on the National Animal Identification System, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced that the USDA will develop a new animal-traceability framework to allow for more flexibility and lower costs while still being able to trace diseased and at-risk animals in the event an outbreak.

While the NAIS called for tracking of every livestock animal in the country, the new system will only track animals moved in interstate commerce. In addition, instead of being led by the federal government, the new approach will be administered by individual states and tribal nations. The new system also allows for lower-cost technology and transparent implementation of the rule-making process.

How the New Framework Affects Small Farmers

According to the USDA, this new system of animal traceability will accomplish the goals of NAIS without overly burdening producers.

Small producers who raise animals and move them within a state, tribal nation or to local markets, and those who raise animals to feed themselves, their families or their neighbors will not be required under federal regulations to implement a tracking device on their animals.

However, the new system will require some kind of tracking device for all animals moving among states or tribal nations. Possible official identification options include branding, metal tags or radio frequency identification. Each state or tribal nation will determine the specific way this animal-disease traceability system is administered.

The total cost of the new framework is not yet known. In an effort to be fiscally responsible, the USDA is attempting to use the resources obtained from the more than \$120 million spent on the NAIS system for the new traceability framework. Some elements of the old system (IT infrastructure, an allocator to provide unique location identifiers and 840 tags) can be implemented in the new system. Animals that have already been tagged will not need to be retagged.

To help offset costs, the USDA will provide funding to states and tribal nations to develop animal-disease traceability options and will work with states and tribal nations to facilitate access to tags.

Voice Your Opinion

Visit the HobbyFarms.com forum

to add your thoughts on the new animal-disease traceability system or see what other farmers are saying. **Bringing It Down-home**

Ruth Brown raises registered dairy goats, horses, ducks, geese and chickens on her 14-acre farm in North East, Pa. Brown, who is a strong opponent of the NAIS primarily because of its invasion of privacy, said she is leery of the new system.

"I guess over the years I've learned not to trust the government," she explained. "They tell us something will be limited, but it doesn't take them long to stretch the program out."

Brown also said while tracking may be OK for animals used for food, she doesn't think animals used for breeding or for showing between state lines should require tracking.

Another small-scale livestock operator, Tony Wisdom, has 11 Boer goats, 10 nannies, a young Billy and two donkeys on his farm outside of New Braunfels, Texas. An opponent of the NAIS, Wisdom said he thinks the system creates extra costs and hassle.

"I feel that it is another way for the government to make more money off of the small-scale livestock farmer or hobby farmer like me," he said.



The Next Steps In March 2010, the USDA will convene a meeting with state and tribal nation representatives to work with producers to establish standards and allow for input on animal-disease traceability framework and regulations.

The USDA plans to re-establish the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health with the purpose of providing feedback on the new animal-disease traceability system, as well as working with issues, such as confidentiality and liability. USDA hopes for this group to begin work in the summer of 2010.

The USDA will convene regularly with a group of federal, state and tribal nations animal health officials to review options for the new system, give input and listen to feedback from the public.

By winter 2010-11, the USDA hopes to publish a proposed rule for animal-disease traceability's minimum standard and system performance. At that time, comments and feedback from the public will be allowed for 90 days.

The date for the finalization of the animal disease traceability framework depends on the length of the rulemaking process. What Can You Do?

If you have concerns about the new system, contact your USDA area veterinarian in charge, your state veterinarian or your tribal animal health officials with comments. To find your state veterinarian, visit www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability and in the "Quick Links" menu, click on "State Veterinarian Directory." You can comment now or wait until the 90 days during the rulemaking process.