Animals (and Disease) on the Move: Implementation and Implications of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

"Animal Tracing" (/full-blog/category=%22Animal+Tracing%22), "USDA" (/full-blog/category=%22USDA%22), "Veterinary Practice" (/full-blog/category=%22Veterinary+Practice%22)

With the arrival of the H1N1 outbreak this year, national concern has arisen regarding the ease and speed at which a disease can move through a population. Alarm accompanies virtually all new strains of disease and rears its ugly head on a relatively regular basis. While diseases that affect humans are often the main focus, they are not the only cause for concern in the community. In 2004, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recognized a concern for disease outbreak in the agricultural community, as well. In response, the USDA introduced the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) to safeguard the health of livestock and poultry and the economic interests of those industries. The Kentucky Horse Council.

NAIS creates a partnership between the affected industries and state and federal governments whose main task is to form a fast-acting disease response network. United States Department of Agriculture: National Animal Identification System (NAIS), http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml (last visited Nov. 1, 2009). Once implemented and enforced, NAIS will provide the USDA with the tools to (1) pinpoint the origin of harmful disease, and (2) impede the spreading thereof. Whenever there is an outbreak of disease, animal health officials will, within 48 hours, be able to identify which animals are involved, where those animals are currently located, and what other animals may also have been exposed.


Because a single report of disease such as Bovine Tuberculosis or Equine Viral Arteritis can rapidly halt the movement of animals and raise questions about their health, it carries significant negative consequences for the owner. Some of these consequences include lower selling prices, lost jobs, and decreased income. Premises regulation takes the unaffected producer out of the equation and allows him to maintain the luxury to move his animals freely.

Animal identification is the second way in which producers can participate in NAIS. During this process, an identification number is assigned to either an individual animal (Animal Identification Number, AIN) or a group of animals (Group/Lot Identification Number, GIN). See supra USDA: About NAIS. The AIN or GIN is attached to the animal using either an ear tag or injective responder, and it remains associated with that animal throughout its entire lifetime.

The final way a producer can participate is through animal tracing, a process that allows the USDA to access animal movement records and locate at-risk animals. The main component is a network of Animal Tracking Databases (ATDs) that makes it easy for producers, the state, industry, and the USDA to define the scope of a particular disease and locate infected animals. USDA: Animal Tracing, http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/animal_track/index.shtml (last visited Nov. 1, 2009). This is perhaps the least developed component of NAIS.

NAIS is important for the agricultural industry because it plays an important role in monitoring, eradicating, and controlling harmful diseases such as Bovine Tuberculosis and Equine Viral Arteritis that can have widespread consequences. USDA: Why NAIS, http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/why/animal_disease.shtml (last visited Nov. 1, 2009). The program is not, however, well received by many members of the agricultural community. These producers, owners, and associations debate the program’s value in consideration with its significant costs. See notes. The Kentucky Horse Council.
I have 20 chickens that all look the same. I watch a hawk take one away. So I am supposed to safely climb in my rafters to scan the chickens there (why should they stay there for me?), scan the chickens under the pine trees, scan the chickens eating woodticks and bugs at my neighbors (for disease control) just so I can tell the government which chicken the hawk took. And use the $300 scanner I had to purchase for it. What about the chicken who fries his chip on the electric fence? Or the chips that just plain don't work?

So I ride my horse around the block and I have to report it to the government in 24 hours. What kind of government takes away the personal freedom our fathers fought for? Yet the level 3 sex offender can go where ever he wants? The government can't find 11 million ILLEGAL immigrants, yet they want to keep 24 hour track of over 1 billion animals? What is more dangerous - my chickens, a level 3 sex offender or an illegal immigrant (duh potential terrorist) who won't check in? Just follow the money trail and our political "leaders" and it all...
makes sense why they would do it. Also lack of common sense. Does absolutely nothing for food safety or disease prevention.

Barbara 9 years ago · 0 likes

Quote: "As a consumer i support this. If it helps to be able to track the tainted meat my kids eat, I'm all for it"

It won't track tainted meat because NAIS ends at slaughter where tainted meat begins. Even USDA admitted in the 2006 NAIS User Guide that NAIS is not a food safety system.

Anonymous 9 years ago · 0 likes

As a consumer and owner of livestock, I know full well that most of the contamination of food occurs at the processing plants. NAIS is just a ploy by Corporate AG to open our market to more low quality imported foodstuffs and open foreign markets to their high priced value added items. They have traceback after all bought and paid for by the small farmers they are driving out of business through the use of the very same program they will benefit from. NICE. Tracking my horse from birth to death will not make your children safe. Learn to cook meat to the right temperature and practice proper sanitation. The USDA should go back to inspecting the processing plants on a daily basis instead of sitting on their butts playing desk jockey, writing stupid rules and regs that place a huge burden on small farms and hobbyists all across the USA while giving corporate AG a free pass and Welfare programs for the rich. IE, Monsanto, Cargill, Tyson/Petruel. This program will not prevent disease, it will only provide scapegoats when corporate AG poisons one of your kids through bad sanitation at the processing facilities.

Anonymous 9 years ago · 0 likes

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USDA Secretary Vilsack has been promoting the concept of using sound science. But what does sound science mean? And what does sound science mean in regards to NAIS?

To me, sound science means analyzing all the costs of implementing a program, such as NAIS, versus the benefits a program would provide in controlling, monitoring, and stopping the spread of disease. If the cost outweighs the benefit, it is a scientifically unsound approach to disease management.

According to the 2009 Benefit Cost Analysis performed by Kansas State University with the support and assistance of Neil Hammerichmidt (NAIS coordinator) and Dr. Wiemers (NAIS staff), here is the conclusion regarding equine:

"At this time, we cannot definitely conclude from our analysis and available data whether benefits of full NAIS adoption in equine exceed cost of adoption. More research is needed to quantify benefits of NAIS adoption that we have omitted in the equine industry."

After a 2-year study and almost $500,000 spent, I would take that as a NO for NAIS.

(please see the more user-friendly www.nonais.org site for a continuation of this comment).
8. Did you know that contracts use certain words for a reason that being clarity of what the
     two parties are signing into? Signing up for NAIS clouds title to your property, basically
     making you a sharecropper. Look up meanings for “premises” and “stakeholder”. lectric
     law library(www.lectlaw.com) states that the word premises signifies a formal part of a deed and is
     made to designate an estate; to designate is to name or entitle. Therefore a premises has no
     protection under the United States constitution and has no exclusive rights of the owner tied
     to it. A “stakeholder” is someone who holds the stakes, like in poker, until the true owner is
     decided.

9. Have you read the NAIS business plan document? Those of us who have are being accused
     by the USDA of spreading misinformation yet how is it misinformation to disagree with
     something and tell exactly what it says in the document? We have been told NAIS will not be
     like what we are claiming it to be, it is just a harmless traceback program for our benefit and
     safety that will not take away our rights or cost much, if anything! Can we sue them if it
     turns out they are wrong and we are right after all? Of course not, it is my responsibility to
     investigate and come to my own conclusions about NAIS and in reading the document have
     seen I want no part of this program! And many others have done the same thing and come to
     the same conclusion.

10. Would you agree to do my laundry for me? I also want you to pay ME for you doing my
     laundry! I do not care if you want to or not, I am sending it to you anyway. I do not care how
     much it costs you in extra time and money to do my laundry, that you may have to buy
     another washing machine and oh yes, you must report to the govt every wash load you do
     besides mine! I am getting a load ready to send your way now and if you resist or refuse it is
     because you are misinformed! After all, it is for your own good!

I can only equate NAIS with someone wanting to throw a rabid rattlesnake in my living
room, telling me it is a puppy that will not bite, but all my eyes, ears and other senses are
        telling me that this is a dangerous animal that I want no part of!

Anonymous 9 years ago · 0 Likes

questions for the author pt 2

4. Why do factory farms get only one lot number per groups of animals and do not have to
report all animal movements (any one of those animals could be diseased and who would
know) while the rest of us have to tag, file birth, death and movement reports (w/in 24 hrs
per even or be fined for late reports) on every single critter and risk losing them to
depopulation should disease be suspected!

5. Did you know that many have been signed up for NAIS without their permission or
knowledge (nearly 14,000 in Idaho). Would you like to be signed up, say for a new car lease
without your permission or knowledge, be responsible for the monthly payments and not
even sure the car will run?

6. Did you know one of the reasons we are told NAIS is needed is to stop mad cow disease!
Yet when Creekstone Beef wanted to test every cow they process for BSE, the USDA says
they cannot!!! Creekstone had to take the USDA to court to sue for the right to test for BSE!
They lost because the USDA claimed everyone would have to do it and it would cost too
7. Do YOU want to tell the govt everywhere you go just because you own a bike, skis, rollerskates, like to go to dances or bars? Since when did we become Russia?

Anonymous 9 years ago · 0 Likes

I am glad the author is reading through the comments. To call us passionate is a word I have heard before from others in the iwantnais nomatterwhat community. I hope the author is reading this one as I am going to ask some questions that the USDA will not answer but they sure do encourage us to sign up anyway.

1. Would you buy a car, house or other large investment without having important questions answered, like gas mileage, condition of engine, what are the exact payments each month, etc? Yet we are expected to buy into NAIS blindly!

2. Why does the NAIS document allow only for depopulation, not treatment or prevention, when disease is suspected in an area? Someone's chicken is suspected of bird flu (less than 300 human deaths worldwide but 1000's die of regular flu each month in the US) and all the birds, perhaps other animals, in a 6 mile radius are killed, the great majority never having come in contact with the suspected sick bird! That is 140 sq miles of dead healthy birds! Who pays for it? What will be done with all the dead bodies, certainly a vector for other disease?

3. If NAIS is such a great program why are there so many anti-NAIS websites popping up on the net? What is it in the NAIS regulations that has so many livestock owners on edge? These websites are overwhelmingly against NAIS for many reasons. Their research using NAIS documents shows that NAIS will only benefit the one entity it was created for, corporate agriculture.

Anonymous 9 years ago · 0 Likes

Tracking disease is not new. In 1938-Nazi Germany targeted one segment of society they thought responsible for spreading disease, the JEWS. A law was passed that ALL JEWS had to register their property, ierevery piece of property they own into a massive database. IT worked. The Gestapo knew exactly who to raid by the value of their art and jewelry. We know the rest of the story, a minor event called the Holocaust!

In the same time period, the Russian Communist Govt under Stalin starved millions of farmers in the most fertile part of the country because the law stated that ALL the grain they grew and their lands belonged to the govt! They were not even allowed to eat what they grew! The reason- Stalin wanted to sell Russian grain on the world market! And the grain was sold while 11 million died from starvation, execution, or prison life!

What if they tried this program with soccer moms, where everyone, in order to help track disease outbreaks among school children, anyone who owns even a single soccer ball must register their home with the govt, microchip the equipment and file reports when it is used just so pro-soccer teams can travel the world saying they are carrying no diseases to other countries, you would hear the biggest outcry in history as in a million mom march in Wash DC!
did you know that while corporate ag gets a free ride by having one lot number per groups of animals, me and other private animal owners will do all the work and cost of tagging and tracking our privately owned animals, and corporate ag gets all the profits and very few reporting events. In other words, I tell the govt when and where I ride my horse, pay for microchipping, lose title to my private property by signing up for the program, risk losing my healthy horse to depopulation should animal disease be suspected in a 160 sq mile area, just so corporate ag can tell Japan their product is safe.

Had a pleasant chat with a very nice lady at FoodLogIQ a company that tracks veggies from farm to store AND cattle in Wisconsin and Canada...I asked did they have plans to include home gardens as they could be a source of pathogenic contamination —she said no that would be too intrusive, too much trouble on their part and logistically impossible and there would be a huge outrage from the people. In other words it just could not be done! I asked but what if salmonella or other pathogen from a private garden somehow got on the produce that would eventually go to the factories for canning, freezing or just to any grocery store...her reply was the factories are rigidly controlled to prevent that kind of stuff and the TRACBACK WOULD BE JUST TO THE INFECTED PRODUCE THAT CAME FROM THE FIELDS (regardless of how they were infected) NOT THE PRIVATE GARDEN FROM WHICH THE ACTUAL INFECTION MAY HAVE COME FROM!! And from this past few months we have experienced how stringent these factories truly are when it comes to tainted food (i.e. peanuts) so I asked her if the govt knowing about every privately home grown tomato or cucumber was too intrusive AND UNWORKABLE then why does the same argument not hold for privately owned cattle, goats, pigs, ponies, chickens, etc when it comes to NAIS. She agreed with me.

NAIS is trying to be a one-size-fits-all program yet there is a huge difference between granny's back yard hens, a pot belly pig in suburbia, horses which are not in the food chain and the multi-billion dollar corporate ag and factory farms, which this program was ultimately made for.

The Australian version of NAIS is a fiasco: 30% failure rate of chips and readers, the high fines the owners have to pay for computer glitches, 11 million phantom cattle in the database AND they are losing their global market!

I do not own cattle and am in no way connected to the beef/pork/chicken industry but because I own horses, I will be forced to be part of NAIS, thereby working for free for big ag, and paying into the system with my time and money just so those who eat meat can enjoy “the appearance” of safe beef/pork/chicken... Will they actually be safer because I told the govt everywhere I rode my horse, gave up my property rights and spent thousands of dollars in microchipping, report fees and technical equipment? This also goes against the 13th amendment, the one that freed the slaves and also outlawed involuntary servitude!
Where ever I go on the net and read articles about NAIS the comments are not for NAIS. The listening sessions held during the summer by the USDA about NAIS show the people are overwhelmingly against NAIS. But the USDA said these sessions showed “substantial support” for NAIS... Huh??!! They apparently were listening with fingers in their ears.) Anonymous has shown that he has no respect for the Bill of Rights or his fellow Americans. NAIS affects ALL livestock owners, including those who keep animals for personal use. We don’t need to identify our animals to satisfy a buyer, or to manage our herd.

The Cost Benefit Analysis that was finally done shows a tremendous amount of bias in its findings. It is full of assumptions and ignores the effect on small producers. The major benefit of NAIS is for importers and exporters. Small producers are just expected to suck it up and pay for something they don’t want. For a detailed review of the Analysis, see http://farmandranchfreedom.org/content/files/FARFA-comments-USDA-090520.pdf

As a horse owner, that $2 tag you refer to, translates into a $20 implantable microchip plus veterinary costs. Chips have been shown to cause sarcoïds and tumors in some animals. See http://arkansasanimalproducers.8k.com/whats_new_46.html and have also had other bad effects. See http://www.invisio.nl/antichip/

Even if we were willing to sacrifice the health of some animals for NAIS, the technology itself is worthless. Read the section on Shortcomings of the RFID System at http://www.dairygojournal.com/issues/84/84-6/Heather_Smith_Thomas.html

I don’t care what other countries are doing. To paraphrase your mother, if all the other countries jump off a cliff, are you going to jump also? The USA is supposed to be ruled by the people, not those who hold high position in government, and the people spoke at the USDA Listening Sessions this past spring and by an overwhelming majority told the USDA to scrap NAIS.

Nais should be mandated period. While these small farmers are complaining and worrying about a 2 dollar tag other countries are moving forward with animal id. They say they can sell to their neighbors and who needs USDA, but what neighbor can the people in Manhattan NY buy from, Brooklyn? They are cutting their own throats. Even S America is moving forward with animal id. Get a grip farmers.

I appreciate and am excited by your passionate responses to my blog article, even if some of you suggest that I am backed by the USDA and caught up in some delusion of government-regulated bliss. The purpose of the KJEANRL blog is to incite relevant scholarly dialogue among those in the agricultural, natural resources, and equine communities. I am thrilled to see such dialogue unfolding.

It is clear from your responses that NAIS is an extremely controversial and important issue in the agricultural community. It is also clear that my research, which in the interest of time depended mostly on the USDA and KY Dept. of Agriculture websites, may not have presented the anti-NAIS viewpoint as thoroughly as desired. I apologize for that but encourage you to let your voices be heard.

The Kentucky Journal of Equine, Agricultural & Natural Resources Law invites unsolicited
articles and essays focusing on the topics such as NAIS and I encourage you to submit your work on this issue. More information on submissions can be found under the “Submissions” tab on the KJEANRL blog.

Sincerely,
Stephanie M. Wardock

Henwhisperer  9 years ago  · 0 Likes

I wonder how much the author got paid by an industry group, or perhaps USDA, to write this article?

Success in Australia? No. Please, do some research before you write an article so that you do not, like you have done here, embarrass yourself.

Barbara  9 years ago  · 0 Likes

Why does the author make it sound like we are imagining that USDA wants no exceptions to the registration requirements? They have said so themselves. The only exceptions will be those people that they can’t find. The Draft Plan and subsequent documents make it quite clear that they expect the owner of any livestock animal to register the property where that animal resides—even if it isn’t their own property. They aren’t even allowing First Amendment religious objections.

NAIS is unworkable in the real world. It relies on total compliance, animals that cooperate, error free data entry, and a computer system that never fails. And even if all that were possible, it doesn’t prevent a disease from spreading. It merely gives false reassurances that the disease is contained.

The real purpose of NAIS is to allow faster international trade by lowering import standards. What that means in practice, is that USDA knows they will allow a diseased animal to cross our borders. Rather than try to stop disease at the borders, NAIS will “close the barn door after the horse is loose” and try to figure out which way it went.

A phased in approach to disaster and loss of civil rights does not encourage me to sign on. I’m also not encouraged by Australia’s ruined ranchers, or the EU’s governmental control of everything.

Walter Jeffries  9 years ago  · 0 Likes

 Actually, Premise ID which is the first part of NAIS is mandatory in Wisconsin. It is unfortunate that articles like this delude people into thinking that the government is cuddly.

Anonymous  9 years ago  · 0 Likes

Yes, NAIS is still voluntary but, make no mistake, the plans are to make it mandatory so that every individual livestock owner will not only have to pay to implant an electronic ID tag in each animal (horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, llamas, donkeys, geese, chickens, etc.), they will also be FORCED to register their premises. Can you tell us where in the US Constitution that this privacy invading big government intrusion in our lives is granted?