

Questions and Answers on the National Animal Identification System

(Adapted from United States Department of Agriculture Factsheets)

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National Animal Identification System

Q. What is the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)?

A. The NAIS is a system of identifying all premises and animals involved in animal agriculture and tracking them through the production chain for disease traceback ability. This includes when animals are moved from the premises of origin and commingled with animals from other premises at exhibition centers, fairs, trail rides, etc. The goal of the NAIS is to have the capability to identify all animals and premises that had direct contact with a foreign animal disease or disease of concern within 48 hours of discovery.

Q. Why is a National Animal Identification System Needed?

A. A national animal identification system is needed to help protect American animal agriculture from foreign or domestic disease threats. Finding potentially sick or exposed animals early in a disease outbreak is essential to containing or eradicating the disease quickly. The NAIS would allow for rapid tracing of animals in the event of an outbreak, helping to limit the scope and expense of the outbreak and allowing us to minimize impact on domestic and foreign markets. The NAIS will also be critical as USDA, States, and industry work to complete the disease eradication programs in which we have invested many years and millions of dollars.

The NAIS may have merit for producers for other reasons as well, including providing additional marketing opportunities. Having the NAIS in place can help to regain those international markets which were closed due to our cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) as well as help in the enhancement of current markets and development of new export markets. The NAIS can also help meet the demands of our domestic consumers who are asking to know more about the food they are consuming. The NAIS will help uphold the reputation of the United States as having healthy animals and will promote continued confidence in American agricultural and animal products.

Q. Why is 48-hour Traceback Capability Needed?

A. To protect the health of the U.S. herd, sound scientific principles indicate that being able to track and contain a disease within 48 hours is essential. For the industry to maintain confidence in animal health, it will need to demonstrate its ability to meet this standard.

Q. What are the Benefits for Producers to Participate in the NAIS?

A. The adoption of a national animal identification system will help secure the health of the national herd. The program will provide animal owners and animal health officials with the infrastructure to improve current disease eradication and control efforts; protect against widespread foreign and domestic animal disease outbreaks; and provide infrastructure to address threats from deliberate introduction of disease.

The industry may integrate the standards defined through the NAIS with their management systems and performance recording programs. Using the same identification technologies for both regulatory and industry programs allows for the development of a more cost-effective and user-friendly system for the animal owner. Animal owners can also benefit from the additional animal identification information that could be obtained through industry programs to improve production efficiencies and add value to their animals. However, the information systems would be completely separate: Proprietary production data will not be transmitted to nor maintained in the NAIS information repositories.

Q. What is a Repository?

A. A repository is an computer-based database where data for the NAIS will be stored.

Premises Identification System

Q. Where Do Producers Get Premises Identification Numbers?

A. Producers can obtain a Premises Identification Number by completing a premises registration form. The forms are available through the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, University of Tennessee Extension, Tennessee Farm Bureau, and Tennessee Farmers Cooperative. The completed form can be returned to any of these organizations for the data to be entered and have a Premises Identification Number assigned. Once the basic information about the premises/operation and contact person is entered, the producer will receive an identification card with the premises identification number and physical address.

Q. What Information Is Required When Registering A Premises?

A. The premises registration system will record information such as address, contact name, type of premises, and phone number to contact the person in charge of the health of the animals on the premises. Key pieces of information will be sent to the national premises information repository so that it will be available in the case of a disease traceback.

Q. How is a premises defined, such as when a farm or ranch has a primary farm or home place and several other distinct locations in which livestock are reared?

A. A premises is defined as a location where animals are raised, held, or boarded. Sometimes, a livestock production enterprise contains multiple locations. Some of the locations are permanent facilities such as feedlots, permanent pastures with animal handling facilities, breeding farms, or nurseries. Other sites are used only on a temporary basis such as stalk fields, wheat pastures, and public lands for grazing purposes. In the event of a disease outbreak, premises that are epidemiologically linked with the source herd or flock will need to be found. As these premises are identified and located on a map, a “picture” of the outbreak is generated. The more premises that are identified prior to the outbreak, the more quickly the size and scope of the outbreak can be estimated, the more quickly adequate resources can be determined, and the more quickly the disease will be contained. In this way, the economic impact of the outbreak will be lessened.

Ideally, each distinct location would be identified with a unique premises number. At a minimum, the “home place” in which animals are raised needs to be registered for the operator to obtain a unique PIN. Additional locations are not required to be registered at this time, although it is highly encouraged.

Q. How do I register a premises that does not have a physical address?

A. Your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office can assist you in completing the additional forms which are required in registering a premises which does not have a physical address. When completing the form you will need driving directions to the premises from a main intersection. When providing the driving directions, use directional indicators (East, West, South, and North), give number of miles from turns, and indicate on which side of road premises is located. You will also need the GPS coordinates for the premises in decimal degrees format. FSA can assist in obtaining these coordinates.

Q. What if I lease a farm?

A. If you lease a premises and want to register it, you will need the permission of the landowner to do so. Verbal permission is sufficient.

Q. Producer: We own property that crosses State lines, so our cattle graze in different States while in the same pasture. Will we need to get a separate PIN for each part of the property based on the State where it's located?

A. If a property crosses State lines but is managed by the same operator as part of an operation where cattle routinely commingle, it will most likely be sufficient to obtain a single PIN. In these cases, the property owner/manager should contact the appropriate authority in each State where the property lies and explain the situation to determine how best to proceed with premises identification. The owner/manager may wish to begin with the State veterinarian that is responsible for certifying the herd's disease status or with the State in which the cattle management facilities are located.

Q. Producer: We manage cattle from multiple owners. We maintain individual animal identification by tattoos and tags so we can identify owners and offspring, but we group the animals by nutritional needs. Do we need to obtain multiple PINs for each owner?

A. No, you do not need to obtain multiple PINs for each owner. PINs refer to geographic locations where animals are held, managed, or boarded. In this case, the cattle manager would obtain one PIN for his operation, since all of the cattle he manages commingle. If the cattle are born or held elsewhere before being sent to the manager in question, those other locations should also have PINs.

Eventually, each head of cattle should be individually identified with an AIN Tag. When the animal is moved, the animal's movement will be reported, allowing the database to associate the AIN to the receiving location's PIN.

It is important to note that the AIN associated with each animal will never change (the AIN Tag will be permanent), and the PIN associated with each location will never change. However, in the database, the PIN associated with each animal will change on the date of the animal's movement, and a travel record will be created.

Q. Will Stakeholders Need More Than One Premises Identification Number if They Have More than One Species on Their Premises?

A. No. A single premises identification number will be used for each location, regardless of the number of species associated with it. In other words, a producer will not have a separate premises identification number for beef cattle, dairy cattle, swine, etc.

Animal Identification and Tracking

Q. What Forms of Identification Will be Used?

A. USDA understands that there is no "one-size-fits-all" identification technology. Many methods are currently on the market: radio frequency identification devices, retinal scans, DNA, etc.

It is likely that some technologies will work better for some species than for others. Rather than focus on a specific technology, USDA will focus on the design of the identification data system—what information should be collected and when it should be collected and reported.

Once the identification system is designed, the market will determine which technologies will be the most appropriate to meet the needs of the system.

The cattle industry has chosen to use radio frequency identification tags. Animals do not have to be tagged at birth but are to be tagged prior to entering commerce or being commingled with animals from other herds of origin. It has become industry standard for these tags to be applied in the left ear.

Q. When a cow is sold to another producer, does the cow now acquire another premises tag for the new location?

A. No, the cow will have one official tag with the Animal Identification Number (AIN) printed on it. This tag does not contain the Premises Identification Number (PIN) for the premises of origin nor any premises the animal is on thereafter. When the animal is sold, the animal's movement will be reported, allowing the database to associate the AIN to the buyer's PIN. Let's say Rancher A lives at Premises A12345D and his bull is assigned AIN 840123456789012. Rancher B owns Premises Z54321A.

If Rancher A with Premises A12345D sells bull 840123456789012 to Rancher B, Premises Z54321A, the bull's AIN will remain the same (840123456789012). However, the PIN associated with the bull will change on the date of the movement. For example, the information system could have information similar to this:

Animal: 840123456789012
Date: February 2, 2004
Premises: A12345D
Event: Tag applied

Animal: 840123456789012
Date: October 1, 2004
Premises: Z54321A
Event: Moved in

Q. Do Horse Owners Have to Eartag Their Horses?

A. No. Species-specific working groups, which are providing input to USDA, are aware of traditional methods of identifying animals and will not recommend methods that are contrary to current practices. The goal is to provide valid identification without compromising other needs of a given species. The horse working group has recommended a radio frequency implant in a specific location under the mane.

Q. Where Do Producers Get Official Animal Identification Numbers?

A. Following premises registration, producers may contact an animal identification number manager in their area to obtain official animal identification numbers (AIN). AINs will be issued to the premises and linked to the animals in a way that is appropriate for the species. For example, cattle producers may use ear tags on their animals, while LaMancha goat producers may require a different type of identification method, since their animals have very small ears. Producers should check with their State or Tribal animal health authority to determine who they should contact about AINs. In many cases, the States and Tribes are in the preliminary stages of implementing the NAIS, so they may not have an AIN manager in place yet.

Please Note: Other identification numbering systems defined in the Code of Federal Regulations will remain official through a NAIS transition period. Producers should check with a State, Federal, or Tribal animal health authority for more information about obtaining AINs and Group/Lot Identification Numbers for various livestock species.

Q. Who Are Animal Identification Number Managers?

A. Animal Identification Number Managers are those organizations such as retail outlets, auction markets, cattleman's associations, etc. who will distribute official Animal Identification Numbers (AIN), allocate those AINs to the appropriate premises, and report the allocation of those AINs to the national repository.

Q. Will Animal Owners Need to Have a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Reader?

A. USDA is maintaining a technology-neutral position with regard to the technologies that will be used to identify animals. USDA is developing the standards for collecting and reporting information, but industry will determine which type of identification method or methods work best for each species.

Radio frequency technology is one form of electronic identification that has been discussed for use with cattle. Animal owners that use RFID for official identification will most likely not necessarily need to have an RFID reader.

For example, a producer may be able to record the RFID code of the electronic device before it is applied to an animal and cross-reference the code with a visual-tag number. This would allow the producer to maintain a record of the RFID code without having to read (scan) the transponder. Industry providers may sell RFID eartag attachments on which the RFID code is printed for visual readability. While reading and recording the RFID code manually is not ideal, it can be achieved.

Q. Who Will Pay for Electronic Identification Readers and Their Installation in Markets and Slaughter Plants? Who Will Pay for the Electronic Identification Devices?

A. The NAIS plan is being developed as an industry-government partnership, so it is expected that industry and the government will share the cost of the necessary elements. At this point, we do not envision any significant Federal funding being used for individual animal tags or other such devices. However, funding of select electronic readers could be accommodated under agreements with some cooperators. We should point out that a variety of identification systems are currently used in the United States to identify various livestock species. The Department's technology-neutral position will allow industry to determine which animal identification method or methods are the most practical and effective for each species.

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, along with the Southeast Livestock Network, is working to help markets in our state assess how they can implement radio frequency technology into their current operations. In addition, some Agricultural Enhancement funds are being made available to livestock markets to help with the cost of equipment and facility modification.

Q. If a Producer Is Currently Using an Identification Program through a Private Service or Marketing Alliance, Will That Identification Be Usable in the NAIS?

A. Yes, assuming the program is compliant with the official NAIS standards which USDA has established for those organizations providing data management service and wanting to provide the necessary data to the national program.

Q. Should Producers or Their Industry Associations Consider Options for Aligning Themselves with a Database Management Provider to Ensure They Remain in Compliance with the NAIS?

A. Producers are free to use any data management service they choose. Many of them provide a valuable service in managing production and marketing data to help producers maximize the profit potential of their agricultural enterprise. These companies will undoubtedly provide much needed animal movement data to the national animal tracking information system.

There are some groups/alliances in Tennessee which have chosen to utilize third-party data management providers in order to provide their producers with additional marketing opportunities and information for improved decision making. The providers these groups have chosen to work with are capable of forwarding the needed data to the national animal tracking information system when it is put into place.

There are, however, no plans to require producers to participate in any private data management system or align themselves with any specific data service provider. USDA would characterize such action as premature if the reason is merely to stay in compliance with the NAIS. There is definitely no urgency, as no immediate implementation requirements have been established. The NAIS will be phased in over time, and an adequate transition period, augmented with abundant public informational materials, will be established for animal owners to work into the system.

USDA is taking necessary steps to have the NAIS data standards established as official; the AIN is an example. Under the NAIS, USDA is proposing that every animal needing to be identified individually would have a 15-character number. Groups or lots of animals would be identified through a 13-character number, and premises would be identified through a 7-character number.

Many producers are already asking to make a move to this numbering system from the multiple systems currently in use. Accordingly, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is planning to pursue rulemaking to recognize for official use the 7-character premises identification number, the 13-character group/lot identification number, and the 15-character AIN. This would allow those who want to start the migration to do so, while not requiring it for others who may not be ready.

Q. Who Will be Responsible for Applying Identification to Animals?

A. During the phase-in period, animals will need to be identified as they leave whatever premises they are on regardless of where they were born. After the first few years of the program, identifying animals will be the responsibility of the "premises of birth" animal owners. For animal owners who lack equipment for individual identification, "tagging stations" will be available and it is expected that livestock markets will offer this service.

Q. What is a Tagging Station and Where Will Such Stations be Located?

A. A tagging station is an entity operating from a fixed location that has been officially approved by APHIS to apply identification devices to animals that are required to be identified.

USDA recognizes that not all animal owners will have facilities to individually tag animals before they leave their premises of origin. Therefore, animal owners who are required to individually tag animals that leave the premises of origin can elect to transport animals to an approved tagging station. They would pay the operator of the tagging station a fee to apply individual animal identification devices and report the identification information to a central information repository. Such tagging stations may include, but not be limited to, an existing livestock marketing facility, a veterinary clinic, a fairgrounds, or a facility specifically dedicated to performing tagging services.

Q. What is the recommended placement of the official identification tag and why?

A. The cattle working group recommends that the tag be placed in the left ear and suggests that each tag company provide directions on how tags should be placed and applied. Attaching the official identification tag consistently in the left ear will help create more awareness that it is the official tag and not to be removed. Proper placement in the ear improves retention and the instructions from the tag manufacturer should be followed by producers when tagging their cattle.

Q. If a Person Raises Animals for His or Her Own Use and the Animals Never Leave the Owner's Property, Do They Need to be Identified?

A. Under the current plan, animals that never leave a premises do not need to be identified. However, animal owners are encouraged to identify their animals and their premises, regardless of the number of animals present, since many animal diseases may be spread whether an animal leaves its home premises or not. Examples of such diseases include West Nile virus, foot-and-mouth disease, vesicular stomatitis, and equine infectious anemia.

Q. If a Person Only Shows Animals or Only Takes Them to Trail Rides, Do They Need to be Identified?

A. When people show or commingle their animals with animals from multiple premises, the possibility of spreading disease becomes a factor. Those animals will need to be identified.

Q. What is "Commingling"?

A. Commingling may be defined as an animal having contact with, or being inter-mixed with, animals other than herdmates from that animal's premises of origin.

Q. Who will be responsible for reporting animal movement?

A. The conclusions of the species working groups are still being reviewed by USDA. (Species working groups—comprised of industry and government representatives—are helping draft NAIS program standards that livestock producers should follow.) The cattle working group has recommended that the reporting of animal movements be the responsibility of the receiving premises (or the person responsible for the animals at the receiving premises). However, the person who is holding the animal would be responsible for ensuring it is properly identified before one of the following events occur: the animal changes ownership, the animal moves interstate, or the animal commingles with animals from other premises.

Q. What will be the procedure for documenting animal movement where ownership does not change, such as transporting heifers for ultrasound evaluation or carrying show animals to shows in several States?

A. The cattle working group suggests that three basic events will trigger the need for reporting animal movements: change of ownership, interstate movement, and multiple owners commingling their animals. Each exhibition will have a PIN, and the site manager will report the AIN of all animals that arrive at that premises and the date of their arrival.

There are essentially four pieces of information required to document an animal movement event:

The Animal Identification Number, AIN;

The Premises Identification Number, PIN, of the location where the event takes place;

The date of the event; and

The event type (movement in, movement out, sighting of an animal at a location, termination of the animal, etc).

If an entity reports the movement event on behalf of a producer, that entity will need a non-producer participant number and will report that number along with the other four pieces of information.

Q. If each location within the ranch has a different PIN, what happens if the owner moves cows from one location to another, such as for breeding purposes?

A. Although the locations within the ranch can have separate PINs, it will not be necessary for producers to report animal movements that occur for typical management purposes within the overall operation. If a producer maintains truly separate cattle operations, however, it will be of merit to have the animals link to separate, specific PINs—for example, if a producer owns both a purebred herd and a commercial herd that are managed at different locations and that are not commingled. Again, having a record of each premises would help animal health officials determine the magnitude of an investigation that would be needed if a disease were identified in one of the animals at that premises.

Data Management, Cost, Confidentiality, and Liability

Q. What Data Will USDA Require, Who Will It be Kept by, and in What Form Will It be Kept?

A. The identification of livestock premises is the foundation of the NAIS and must be established before animals can be tracked.

USDA will require the following pieces of information about registered premises: premises identification number; the name of the entity; appropriate contact person; street address/city/state/zip code; contact phone number, operation type; and the date the premises number was activated, the date the premises number was deactivated, and the reason for deactivation. State or Tribal animal health authorities will receive this data or have access to this data through their premises registration systems, and USDA will store the data in the national premises information repository.

Once an animal has been assigned an AIN, USDA will be able to trace its movements and carry out efficient epidemiological investigations by keeping a record of the AIN, the premises

identification that the AIN was seen at or allocated to, the date the AIN was seen or allocated, and an appropriate event code (e.g. sighting, movement-in, movement-out, etc.). Additional information that can be important in a disease investigation, such as the animal's species, date-of-birth (if possible), sex, and breed, may also be reported on a voluntary basis. This data would be stored by USDA in the national animal identification information repository.

Some species will likely be identified through group/lot identification numbers. In these cases, producers will keep a record of the lot identification number, the premises identification where the lot identification number was seen, and the date it was seen. If species is available, this can also be provided to USDA's national animal identification information repository. Requirements for reporting these movements to the national animal tracking information repository have not been established.

Q. Who Will Have Access to Information in the National Animal Identification Databases?

A. As part of the NAIS, Federal, State, and Tribal animal health and public health officials will have access to the information repositories when they need data to administer animal health programs at the state and national level. For example, they may access the database if a USDA program disease—such as tuberculosis or brucellosis—or a suspected foreign animal disease is reported and requires an epidemiological investigation. They may also access the database during emergency response simulations.

Q. What Species Will be Included in the NAIS?

A. The NAIS is being developed for all animals that will benefit from having a system to facilitate rapid traceback/traceout in the event of disease concern. Currently, working groups are developing plans for aquaculture, camelids (llamas and alpacas), cattle/bison, cervids (deer and elk), equine, goats, poultry, sheep, and swine.

Q. Producer: We sell pregnant cows that a seedstock breeder ships to customers. The customer purchases the calf, but sends the cow back to us after weaning. How will these animals be identified and tracked?

A. The cattle working group suggests that three basic events will trigger the need for reporting animal movements for individual animal tracking: change of ownership, interstate movement, and multiple owners commingling their animals. In this case, the pregnant cows will need to be identified with an AIN before they leave the owner's premises. Their movement to the customer's premises will need to be reported by the customer (or the owner if both parties agree to this arrangement). After the calves are weaned, the owner of the cows will need to report the cows' movement back to their original premises.

The calves will need to be identified with AIN Tags that were assigned to the premises where they were born (the customer's premises) before leaving that premises. This process ensures that the animal tracking system accurately reflects each calf's point of origin (customer's premises) and that the dam's information also reflects that she was located at the customer's premises.

To recap, each location where cattle are held or managed will have a PIN, and each animal will have an AIN Tag. Once the NAIS is fully operational, a cattle owner/operator will report the AINs of all animals that arrive at his or her premises and the date of their arrival.

These are the four pieces of information required to document an animal movement event:

The Animal Identification Number, AIN;
The Premises Identification Number of the location where the event takes place;
The date of the event; and
The event type (movement in, movement out, sighting of an animal at a location, termination of the animal, etc).

Q. How Much Will the Program Cost?

A. It is difficult to quantify the cost of a fully operational system since all of the needed components have not yet been fully defined. For cattle radio frequency identification tags cost about \$2 plus the time to apply the tag.

Q. Who Will Pay for the Identification System?

A. The size and scope of this undertaking demand that it be a cooperative effort. Because it is being developed as an industry-government partnership, it is expected that industry and the government will share the cost of the necessary elements.

Q. Will This be a Mandatory Program?

A. USDA and its cooperators are working toward developing a national program that will allow us to rapidly track animals exposed to a disease concern and that will meet the needs of animal owners, animal industries, domestic and international markets, and consumers.

The system needs to be tested to be sure it is effective and workable. While the NAIS is being developed and refined, producer participation will be voluntary. As the system continues to take shape and is tested for all livestock and food animals, USDA will reassess the need for making some or all aspects of the program mandatory. Some States, such as Wisconsin, have passed laws to make certain components of an animal identification program mandatory in areas under their purview.

Eventually, USDA may move toward a requirement for mandatory premises and animal identification for all species included in the system. If USDA does decide to make all or parts of the NAIS mandatory, we will follow the normal rulemaking process. The public will have the opportunity to comment upon any proposed regulations.

Q. Will Producers be Able to Sell Their Livestock if the Animals are not Officially Identified?

A. Yes, as the plan will begin as a voluntary program. Over time, some markets may require animals to be identified that are not identified now. Species for which identification is currently required will continue to have to be identified prior to entering commerce (e.g., sheep and goats under the national scrapie eradication program).

As the program is phased in, all animals of covered species will be encouraged to have premises identification, and eventually individual identification, prior to sale. For animal owners who lack facilities to apply identification devices at the premises of birth, there will be provisions for initiating the process at the point of sale.

Q. Can Animals be Identified as a Group?

A. Yes, an animal production system can use group/lot identification if the animal owner is able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of State animal health officials that, through group

identification and production records, 1) traceback to all premises that have had direct contact with a suspect animal can occur within 48 hours, and 2) the potential for commingling does not exist. Each group will be identified with a unique and standardized number. Verifiable records will be required to further document premises identification and dates of movement.

Q. What are the Penalties for not Using the Program?

A. At this point, the NAIS is not fully developed and animal owners are not yet required to comply with any rules. When the plan is finished, market forces may drive those involved in the livestock industry toward participation.

Q. What are the Liability Issues of This Program for Animal Owners?

A. USDA's goal for the NAIS is to enhance animal health officials' ability to trace and respond to animal diseases. The key objective is to achieve a timely traceback to minimize the detrimental effect of livestock diseases. Accordingly, USDA and the States will only collect and retain necessary identification data in the preharvest production chain and through final inspection at slaughter establishments. USDA would emphasize that the NAIS, in serving as a repository of verifiable data, will increase the accuracy of animal health information and will not expose producers to unwarranted or additional liability.

Q. What is the Timeline for Implementing This Program?

A. USDA's priority in 2004 was to establish the national premises identification system. Beginning in August 2004, States and Tribes on a limited basis began registering locations where livestock are held, sold, or commingled, using an interim standardized premises registration system provided by APHIS, or systems developed by themselves or others that meet NAIS data standards.

During FY 2004, APHIS provided close to \$12 million to 29 States and Tribes through cooperative agreements to help them implement premises identification as well as to carry out field trials or research to test and fine-tune identification technologies and collect animal movement data. The President's FY 2005 budget called for \$33 million in funding for animal identification, and a portion of this money would go toward establishing additional cooperative agreements to assist States and Tribes in further implementing and testing the system.

USDA envisions that the NAIS will continue to expand in 2006. As States and Tribes gain experience, USDA will integrate those approaches that are most successful into the broader system. USDA will also allow service providers and other participants to gear up their products, programs, and services to meet the demands of a national program.

USDA's current plan is to have the system operational by 2007 with full producer participation by 2009.

Q. What Government Entities Will Have Oversight of This Plan?

A. In keeping with the aim of the program to help safeguard U.S. animal health through disease surveillance and monitoring, which includes traceback to individual animals within 48 hours, APHIS will administer the program. Further, the plan calls for governance as a joint Federal-State responsibility with industry input. To ensure uniformity of operations across the United States, APHIS and individual State animal health entities will develop and administer key regulatory elements of the plan.

Q. What Will be the Identification Requirements for Animals Entering the United States from Other Countries?

A. Live animals imported into the United States will require identification levels equivalent to what is required of producers in the United States for interstate movement. USDA anticipates that the NAIS will be compatible with exporting countries' systems. Imported animals will maintain their country of origin identification and will be tracked just like domestic livestock. The country of origin identification will be considered official in the United States, and the animals will not need to be re-identified.

Q. With the Phase-out of Existing Official Animal Identification Devices, What Will Happen with Brucellosis Vaccination Tags? Will They Still be Used?

A. Identification numbering systems defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, such as those provided through brucellosis vaccination tags, will remain official through a NAIS transition period. It is likely that brucellosis vaccination tags will be phased out gradually as individual vaccination records are included in the database linked to each AIN. Producers should check with a State, Federal, or Tribal animal health authority for more information about obtaining AINs and Group/Lot Identification Numbers for various livestock species.

Q. What Will Happen with the National Scrapie Eradication Program's Identification System?

A. In 2001, APHIS implemented a national scrapie eradication program, which included a mandatory national identification component for sheep and goats. It has become apparent from producer and industry feedback that the current sheep and goat identification system needs to be improved in ways that will ensure compliance and improved animal tracking capability without impeding the flow of commerce at points of animal concentration.

On August 4, 2004, APHIS posted a request for information (RFI) on identification technologies that could enhance sheep and goat identification, tracking, and compliance monitoring. The identification technology will be used to identify sheep and goats in APHIS' National Scrapie Eradication Program. The RFI should allow APHIS to both make an informed decision with regard to contracts for scrapie program identification devices and assist NAIS cooperators in identifying and possibly acquiring various technologies to evaluate for sheep and goats.

Since USDA is working to incorporate identification systems already in existence, such as cattle brands and identification tags distributed as part of the scrapie eradication program, the scrapie eradication team is working closely with the NAIS team to ensure that scrapie program identification meets the requirements of both the scrapie program and the NAIS.

With consistency being a key objective of the NAIS, AIN distributed through USDA's national allocator will become the official numbers for use in the scrapie eradication program. It is likely that animals currently identified through other official plans/programs will be "grandfathered" into the program, meaning animal owners will phase in AINs on animals identified for the first time after a mutually acceptable date.

In addition, USDA envisions that the current scrapie premises identification numbers may be cross-referenced with the new national premises identification numbers. Animal owners will still be able to use the current premises identification number until it is phased out over time.

Q. What is USDA Doing to Ensure the Privacy of Ranchers' and Farmers' Records? Will Information Collected for the NAIS be Exempted from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)?

A. USDA recognizes the concerns about the confidentiality of this information and is working on options to allay these concerns. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the national information repositories will only include information for animal and disease tracking purposes. Proprietary production data will remain in private databases.

FOIA can be used to obtain information from a Federal agency when that agency has custody and control of a record. USDA is very much aware of producers' concerns about the confidentiality of information collected as part of the NAIS and is taking them very seriously as officials explore the most effective means for collecting animal identification information. Accordingly, USDA is pursuing various options for appropriately protecting the information in the NAIS from public disclosure.

Under Tennessee law, information gathered for Homeland Security purposes, such as for NAIS, is to be kept confidential.

Q. Where Can Interested Stakeholders Go to Obtain More Information About This Plan?

A. Information about the NAIS is available at <http://www.usda.gov/nais/>

Q. Is There Still Time to Have Input into the NAIS?

A. The development of a system with this kind of scope and complexity, requiring a substantial investment on the part of both the public and private sectors, needs to be developed with ample opportunity for input by those affected. With this in mind, USDA published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPRM) on July 14, 2004, that, among other things, solicited comments on when and under what circumstances the NAIS should move from being voluntary to mandatory, and which species should be covered now and over the long term. The comment period closed on September 13, 2004.

In addition to accepting comments through the ANPRM, USDA held listening sessions throughout the country. APHIS has posted the comments from these sessions on its Web site at http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/newsroom/listening_sessions.shtml

Eventually, USDA may move toward a requirement for premises and animal identification for all species included in the system. If USDA does decide to make all or parts of the NAIS mandatory, APHIS will follow the normal rulemaking process. The public will have the opportunity to comment upon any proposed regulations.

Stakeholders may also contact one of the NAIS Issue or Species Working Groups. These groups are providing detailed recommendations to USDA regarding the implementation of the NAIS. Contact information for these working groups will soon be available on the APHIS Web site at <http://www.usda.gov/nais/>

Source: United States Department of Agriculture, National Animal Identification System Questions and Answers