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## **Dust Flying in Countryside Over USDA Animal ID Proposal Farmers and Ranchers Appeal to Vilsack for Adequate Time to Respond**

Austin, TX: Forty-nine advocacy groups representing the interests of family farmers, ranchers, and consumers have formally requested that USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack extend the public comment period for a controversial new proposal that would require livestock producers in the U.S. to incur significant expense tracking animals that cross state lines. The comment period on the proposed "Traceability for Livestock Moving Interstate" is scheduled to end on November 9, and the organizations have requested an additional 60 days.

"The period for public comment coincides with the fall harvest and comes during the worst drought ever recorded in some major livestock production regions," said Judith McGear, Executive Director of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance and vice-chair of the USDA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health. "Our farmers and ranchers are struggling to get their crops in and save their animals, and they need more time to assess the impacts of the proposed rule."

The groups' letter to Secretary Vilsack pointed out that many farmers and ranchers are not online, slowing the speed of communication. "According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, more than 40% of farms do not have internet access," stated the letter.

"We have a significant number of Amish and Mennonite members, who can only be contacted by mail or through print publications," explained Mark A. Kastel, senior farm policy analyst at The Cornucopia Institute. "They, in turn, will have to mail their comments to USDA. If the agency actually wants to hear from these livestock owners, it needs to extend the comment period."

Some groups have questioned the agency's willingness to respond to producers' concerns.

"A coalition of cattle groups presented USDA with a reasonable plan for cattle identification, but the agency persists in proposing unworkable rules," contends R-CALF USA CEO Bill Bullard. "The least the agency can do is extend the comment period so that the cattlemen can comment on the proposal when they're not in the middle of the calf-weaning and shipping seasons."

The proposal has raised concerns about the economic impacts on both livestock producers and related businesses.

Gilles Stockton, a member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils said, "It will take a significant amount of time to pencil out the true costs of this proposal. Livestock producers, sale barns, and states deserve adequate time to figure these costs and give comment."

“All of our farmers and ranchers are deeply concerned about animal health,” concluded McGeary. “They work hard every day to keep their animals healthy, and the agency needs to take the time to understand their concerns about this new proposal and address them.”

The organizations’ letter is posted at <http://farmandranchfreedom.org/ltr-Vilsack-extension>.

The following groups signed the letter: American Agriculture Movement, American Grassfed Association, Ashtabula-Lake-Geauga Counties of Ohio Farmers Union, Buckeye Quality Beef Association, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Cattle Producers of Washington, Citizens for Private Property Rights (MO), Colorado Independent CattleGrowers Association, Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias, The Cornucopia Institute, Dakota Resource Council (ND), Dakota Rural Action (SD), Empire State Family Farm Alliance (NY), Family Farm Defenders, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund, Food and Water Watch, Freedom21, Idaho Rural Council, Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska, Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming, International Texas Longhorn Association, Kansas Cattlemen’s Association, Land Loss Prevention Project, Mississippi Livestock Markets Association, Missouri Farmers Union, Missouri Rural Crisis Center, National Association of Farm Animal Welfare, National Family Farm Coalition, National Farmers Organization, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Association, North Country Sustainability Center (MA), Northern Plains Resource Council (MT), Oglala Sioux Livestock and Landowners Association, Organic Consumers Association, Organization for Competitive Markets, Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens (PA), Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY), R-CALF USA, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, Rural Coalition/ Coalicion Rural, Rural Vermont, Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (VT), Socially Responsible Agricultural Project, South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, Sovereignty International, Virginia Independent Consumers and Farmers Association, Western Organization of Resource Councils, and Weston A. Price Foundation

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