



# Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund<sup>®</sup>

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## **Consumers, Farmers Make Themselves Heard as USDA's National Animal Identification System (NAIS) Listening Tour Continues**

### ***Pasco, Austin and Birmingham Sessions See an Overwhelming Majority Of Speakers Opposing NAIS***

**Falls Church, Virginia (May 21, 2009)** – More consumers are stepping up to complain about the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) as the U.S. Department of Agriculture continues its national listening tour.

During today's stop in Birmingham, Alabama, the tour heard from 30 people, 28 of whom spoke out against NAIS with only two speaking in favor of it.

It was much the same in Austin, Texas yesterday where the tour heard from some 64 people, 58 of whom spoke against any NAIS or advocated for a voluntary, market-driven program only. The results were similar during the session in Pasco, Washington, on Monday where 26 out of 31 speakers voiced opposition to the program.

“Increasingly, we are seeing consumers join forces with farmers in letting the USDA know that NAIS is not a solution for animal health, food safety or food security,” said Judith McGeary, Executive Director of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, who spoke at the Austin meeting.

McGeary, who is also a member of the board of the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, instead called on the USDA to focus its food safety efforts on “high risk situations, namely the factory farms.”

Her comments were echoed by several consumers including 15-year-old Sedge Messegee from Austin who testified before the hearing that factory farms will be one of the major beneficiaries of NAIS.

“It's obvious that the bill makers are thinking of the corporations in (allowing them) to chip just one animal in each herd,” he said. “Doesn't this defeat the claimed

purpose for the identification? Of all the places where sickness develops, feedlots are probably the worst, with their overcrowded quarters and filth.”

Messegee was joined by Katie Myers from San Antonio who spoke in one of the afternoon breakout sessions. “I asked why we are focusing on traceability as opposed to prevention and accountability, which is already in place when purchasing from small farmers with whom consumers have a direct relationship. My question was utterly ignored,” she noted.

At today’s session in Birmingham, Susie Stretton, a farmer who lives near Lake Charles in nearby Louisiana, described the crowd as “diverse” but said the opposition to NAIS was nearly unanimous with only two people in the 75-strong audience speaking in favor of it.

The listening sessions are continuing tomorrow in Louisville, Kentucky and will resume after the Memorial Day weekend with sessions scheduled for May 27 in Storrs, Connecticut and June 1 in Loveland, Colorado.

The USDA has also announced that it is scheduling six more listening sessions between June 9 and June 25 in Jefferson City, Missouri; Rapid City, South Dakota; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Riverside, California; Tallahassee, Florida; and Raleigh, North Carolina.

Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund acting president Pete Kennedy again called on the USDA to use the listening tour to reexamine whether NAIS should be implemented at all. “We continue to be disturbed by statements made by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack that position these listening tour sessions as a forum to resolve differences over how NAIS will be implemented when in reality, the discussion should be about whether NAIS is needed at all.”

The Fund, along with six of its members from Michigan, last year filed suit in the U.S. District Court – District of Columbia against the USDA and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) to stop the implementation of NAIS. An amended complaint was filed in January 2009 with the Fund adding a member from Pennsylvania as a Plaintiff.

The MDA has implemented the first two stages of NAIS – property registration and animal identification – for all cattle and farmers across the State under the guise of its

bovine tuberculosis disease control program. MDA's implementation of the first two steps of NAIS was required, in part, in exchange for a grant of money from the USDA.

The Fund's suit asks the court to issue an injunction to stop the implementation of NAIS at both the State and Federal levels by any State or Federal agency. If successful, the suit would halt the program nationwide.

***About The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund: The Fund defends the rights and broadens the freedoms of sustainable farmers, and protects consumer access to local, nutrient-dense foods. Concerned citizens can support the Fund by joining at [www.farmtoconsumer.org](http://www.farmtoconsumer.org) or by contacting the Fund at 703-208-FARM (3276).***

***The Fund's sister organization, the Farm-to-Consumer Foundation ([www.farmtoconsumerfoundation.org](http://www.farmtoconsumerfoundation.org)), works to promote consumer access to local, nutrient-dense food and support farmers engaged in sustainable farm stewardship.***

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