



# Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund®

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **House Agriculture Subcommittee Hearing Ignores Concerns Over the National Animal Identification System**

### ***Small Farmers Not Asked to Testify, Says Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund***

**Falls Church, Virginia, (March 14, 2008)** – The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund said today that a House subcommittee hearing Wednesday on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) was stacked in favor of groups calling for the mandatory implementation of the program.

“There was virtually no representation for organic and local producers or consumers,” noted Pete Kennedy, acting president of the Fund, “the very groups that are most negatively affected by NAIS.”

The hearing by the U.S. House Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry, was called to review NAIS, which is the USDA’s program to electronically track every livestock animal in the country. Although the program is currently supposed to be voluntary, the USDA has been actively working to make it a mandatory program, Kennedy noted.

“The subcommittee’s hearing was just another step in that effort,” he said, noting that subcommittee chairman Rep. David Scott of Georgia and chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Rep. Collin Peterson of Minnesota, both favor making the system mandatory. “USDA was given almost unlimited time to further sell the program,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy noted that at the state level, where the voices of small farmers are being heard, the opposition to making NAIS mandatory is growing.

Four separate state legislatures—Arizona, Missouri, Nebraska and Kentucky—have already passed anti-NAIS legislation and four others—Texas, Arkansas, Montana, and Utah—are actively considering legislation prohibiting its mandatory implementation.

“At the federal level, our representatives are listening only to the voices of Big Ag who are interested in expanding their markets for export and are trying to convince the public that traceback equals food safety.” said Fund Board member Taaron Meikle. “In reality NAIS will do nothing to make our food safer or our animals healthier. The \$118 million that the USDA has spent so far on NAIS would have been better spent enforcing existing food safety regulations at the slaughterhouse.”

The Fund filed suit last year in the District of Columbia District Court against the USDA and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) to stop the mandatory implementation of NAIS. MDA has implemented the first two stages—property registration and animal identification—as part of a state-wide bovine tuberculosis disease control program.

The Fund’s suit asks the court to issue an injunction to stop the implementation of NAIS at either the state or 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.farmentoconsumer.org](http://www.farmentoconsumer.org) or by contacting the Fund at 703-208-FARM (3276). The Fund’s sister organization, the Farm-to-Consumer Foundation ([www.farmentoconsumerfoundation.org](http://www.farmentoconsumerfoundation.org)), works to support farmers engaged in sustainable farm stewardship and promote consumer access to local, nutrient-dense food.***

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