



Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund®

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Legal Defense Fund Asks USDA to Re-Focus Listening Tour on Search for Workable Food Safety Solutions

Department Urged to Replace National Animal Identification System (NAIS) with True Animal Health and Food Safety Measures

Falls Church, Virginia (June 2, 2009) – With the next round of hearings by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) set to begin next week, the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund is calling on the department to re-focus the second leg of its listening tour on finding true solutions to animal health and food safety.

Acting Fund President Pete Kennedy, noting the overwhelming opposition voiced by consumers and farmers in the seven hearings to date, urged Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to truly listen to the voices already raised.

“More than 90 percent of the people who spoke at the listening sessions so far have spoken out vigorously against NAIS,” he said. At Wednesday’s hearing in Storrs, Connecticut, 15 of 18 speakers were against NAIS including representatives from Farm Aid and Food and Water Watch, Kennedy noted. And at yesterday’s hearing in Loveland, Colorado, 32 people spoke against NAIS, while only five supported it.

“If Secretary Vilsack is listening, we think he’s heard enough. The message is unmistakable: NAIS is not the animal health or food safety solution this country needs.”

Instead Kennedy urged Secretary Vilsack and the USDA to re-focus the upcoming hearings on several alternatives to NAIS including:

- Decentralizing the livestock industry and encouraging local, diversified farms, which would increase animal health, food security, and food safety;
- Increasing inspections of imported animals and agricultural products and barring the entry of animals from countries with known disease problems; and

- Improving enforcement of existing laws and inspections of large slaughterhouses and food processing facilities, including unannounced spot inspections.

“We share the USDA’s and the country’s concern for animal health and the safety of our food supply,” said Fund board member Taaron Meikle, “but NAIS is not the answer. It may be the answer for beef exporters who wish to improve their overseas sales, but it is not the answer to animal health or food safety in our country.”

Meikle noted that most animal health problems that occur today are the result of the high-density confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) that concentrate thousands of animals in one location, while food safety problems begin at the slaughterhouse where NAIS traceability ends.

“By implementing NAIS—which requires small farmers and ranchers to track each animal individually while allowing CAFOs to track all animals under one blanket Group Identification Number—the USDA would be rewarding factory farms whose practices encourage disease while crippling small farms and the local food movement in the name of increased international sales.”

The USDA’s listening tour resumes June 9 in Jefferson City, Missouri and continues to Rapid City, South Dakota on June 11; Albuquerque, New Mexico on June 16; Riverside, California on June 18; Raleigh, North Carolina on June 25; and Jasper, Florida on June 27.

The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense 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 or by contacting the Fund at 703-208-FARM (3276). The Fund's sister organization, the Farm-to-Consumer Foundation (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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