



Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund®

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Opposition Increases Significantly at USDA's National Animal Identification System (NAIS) Listening Sessions

Nearly 750 Farmers and Consumers Attend the Jefferson, Missouri and Rapid City, South Dakota Sessions

Falls Church, Virginia (June 15, 2009) – Resistance stiffened to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) plans to implement the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) as nearly 750 farmers and consumers voiced their opposition to the plan in listening sessions last week.

At the Rapid City, South Dakota session on Thursday—which had the largest turnout of the nine sessions held so far—nearly all of the 400-plus attendees stood up at the beginning of the session in response to the opening speaker's request that those opposed to NAIS stand, noted Jeri Lynn Bakken, regional organizer for the Western Organization of Resource Councils.

In the testimony that followed, seventy of the seventy-two speakers spoke out against NAIS, she said.

One speaker, Judy McCullough, a Moorcroft, Wyoming rancher and president of the Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming, said: "Producers are not interested in being the guinea pigs for a huge, expensive, intrusive government experiment."

Another speaker, Donley Darnell, a New Castle, Wyoming rancher, called NAIS "deeply flawed," adding, "USDA's assertions that NAIS will provide benefits for animal health are not supported, and actually contradict basic scientific principles. Disease must be addressed on a species-specific basis, with an understanding of the causes of the different diseases and the ways the diseases are transmitted."

It was much the same at Tuesday's hearing in Jefferson, Missouri, which was attended by more than 330 farmers and consumers. At that session 54 of the 55 people

who spoke were against the implementation of NAIS, according to Tim Gibbons of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center.

“It was constantly reiterated during the morning and afternoon sessions that USDA should target dollars responsibly toward ‘real’ food safety issues like increased inspections, testing and restricted imports, and not implement a program that is unnecessary and unwanted,” Gibbons said.

“Increasingly and overwhelmingly, the people who speak at these sessions are vigorously opposed to NAIS,” said Pete Kennedy, Acting President of the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund. “Their message is clear: NAIS is not the animal health or food safety solution this country needs.”

Instead, Kennedy again urged Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and the USDA to re-focus the 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.

The USDA’s listening tour continues through the month with hearings in 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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