



Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

USDA Urged To Heed Producer Testimony and Scrap The National Animal Identification System

***Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund Says Enforcing Current
Regulations Is Sufficient For Disease Traceability***

Falls Church, Virginia (July 9, 2009) – The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund is urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to actually listen to and honor the comments offered by the nation’s livestock producers during its multi-city listening tour on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) and scrap the program.

“A common thread that ran through much of the testimony was that existing prevention and tracking programs for animal diseases together with state laws on branding and the existing record-keeping by sales barns and livestock shows provide the mechanisms needed for tracking any disease outbreaks,” said Pete Kennedy, acting president of the Farm-To-Consumer Legal Defense Fund.

“NAIS is simply not needed,” he added. “The USDA continues to confuse industry support for efforts to identify and eliminate animal diseases with support for NAIS, despite the fact that some 80 percent of the people who testified during the hearings testified against the department’s animal identification program,” he said.

Kennedy’s comments came as the USDA wrapped up its 14-city listening tour with a session in Omaha last week. During the tour more than 1,600 people attended listening sessions; almost 500 people testified; and more than 400 of those stated their opposition to NAIS.

“Even the U.S. Congress has grown impatient with the NAIS,” commented Fund board member Taaron Meikle, “with Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro calling continued investment in NAIS ‘unwarranted.’ ”

De Lauro’s comments came in a release explaining the cuts in the 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Bill her subcommittee recommended.

Instead of pouring more money and effort into NAIS, the Fund is urging Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to re-focus the nation's animal disease and food safety efforts on several alternatives 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 at those large facilities.

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 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.

The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense 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 donating or 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, works to promote consumer access to local, nutrient-dense food and support farmers engaged in sustainable farm stewardship. Visit their website www.farmtoconsumerfoundation.org.

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