



Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund®

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Vast Majority of Speakers at USDA's Listening Tour on the National Animal Identification System Say No to NAIS

***Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund Says Message to USDA Is
To Kill NAIS Not Try to 'Fix' It.***

Falls Church, Virginia (May 15, 2009) – Some 100 people attended the kick-off meeting for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's multi-city listening tour on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania yesterday, with an overwhelming majority of them voicing strong opposition to the program.

Farm-to-Consumer acting president Pete Kennedy said that the number and passion of the farmers and consumers speaking out against NAIS at this first stop on the listening tour should cause the USDA to reexamine whether it should be implemented at all.

"The USDA positioned these hearings as a forum to discuss 'stakeholder concerns' about NAIS, but the message they got in Harrisburg was that NAIS is not needed at all," Kennedy said.

Of the 36 people chosen by lottery to speak during the morning session of the day-long meeting, 27 of them were opposed to NAIS, four spoke in favor and five speakers were undecided.

"The people who spoke in favor of NAIS were mostly from organizations like the Farm Bureau which has consistently supported NAIS," said Tom Maurer, a retired farmer who attended the meeting and spoke against the program.

During the afternoon session, participants were separated into three groups that were described by the USDA facilitators as mechanisms for gaining consensus from those at the meeting on NAIS implementation.

“In my session the participants continued to speak out against the implementation of NAIS in any form, even as the USDA facilitator kept trying to elicit comments about how the program could be improved,” Maurer added. “They were just going through the motions,” he said.

“We think the USDA will get the same sort of input from farmers and consumers at each of the upcoming stops on its listening tour,” said Fund board member Taaron G. Meikle.

“More and more people are recognizing that implementing NAIS will do little if anything to improve animal health or food safety in the United States since most animal health problems are the result of the high-density CAFOs that concentrate thousands of animals in one location. Food safety problems begin at the slaughterhouse where NAIS traceability ends,” she said.

“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 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 and seven members from Michigan and one member from Pennsylvania as Plaintiffs.

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 by the USDA 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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