National Animal Identification System and Premises
Identification Applies to Horse Owners
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The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) currently being implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is intended to create a standardized, alpha-numeric system for identification of all livestock in the U.S. The purpose of this new identification system will facilitate “trace back” within 48 hours of a confirmed diagnosis of an animal disease. Many horse owners think this ID program does not apply to them since horses are not considered “food animals”. However, the NAIS applies to all livestock species, including horses since the USDA classifies horses as livestock.

The need for an accurate, rapid, individual animal ID system to trace the origin and movement of diseased and/or exposed animals and to contain, control and eradicate disease quickly was made very obvious with the diagnosis of a BSE-positive cow in Washington State in December 2003. Currently, animal health officials conduct disease trace outs with systems already in place, such as records related to program diseases, on-farm record keeping, required interstate movement certificates and breed registries. However, these epidemiological investigations may take days to weeks to complete because records are often kept on paper or because they are not standardized across state lines.

In April 2004, the USDA announced the framework for implementation of NAIS designed to identify any agricultural premise exposed to an animal disease so that it could be quickly contained and eradicated. When fully implemented, the system capabilities will include tracing a sick animal or group of animals back to the herd or premises that was most likely the origin of infection. Additionally, there will be the ability to trace potentially exposed animals that were moved out from that herd or premises. This will expedite the identification of infected and exposed animals and premises, and facilitate rapid containment of the disease to stop its spread. In a nutshell, this system will create an effective animal tracking system that will help maintain the health of U.S. herds and flocks.

There are two components to the NAIS. The first component is premise identification and registration, which is key to efficient, accurate, and cost-effective disease control efforts. A premise is any location where animals are born, managed, commingled, marketed or exhibited.
Upon registration the USDA will assign a unique seven-character identifier or premises identification number (PIN) to each location (ex. A23L449). A single premise number will be used for each location, regardless of the number of species associated with it. Information collected about the premise will include the street address, the name and telephone number of the person authorities should contact during a disease traceback involving the premises, the type of operation (market, farm, clinic, etc.), and the species housed on that premise. At this time more that 80,000 premises have been registered under the new system.

The second component of the NAIS is animal identification that will be integrated as premises are registered. Unique 15 digit animal identification numbers (AINs) will be assigned to individually identified premises. The first three numbers will be the ISO country code for the United States – 840. The second three will be a three-digit breed code. The remaining nine digits with be the horse’s existing registration number or, if the animal is not registered with a breed association, a randomly generated number. When animals move in groups through the production chain (such as swine and poultry) the group will be identified with a group/lot ID number. The USDA is developing the standards for collecting and reporting information, however industry will determine which type of identification method works best for each species.

In response to the NAIS, the Equine Species Working Group (ESWG) was formed by the American Horse Council (AHC) and includes representatives from nearly thirty national equine organizations. According to the AHC, the purpose of ESWG when it was formed in fall, 2003 was to evaluate the concept of a national ID system and to determine if the horse industry could develop standards of equine identification that would benefit the industry and be compatible with the plans being considered. Through the ESWG, the horse industry is evaluating the overall plan, its benefits, and costs and determining how the industry can develop standards for equine identification that would fit into the system and help the industry.

The ESWG has identified six specific benefits of equine identification.

1. Reduce the potential effect and enhance control of equine disease outbreaks (West Nile Virus, Vesicular Stomatitis, strangles, neurological form of Equine Herpes Virus, etc.). A national identification system for equines in the U.S. would enable officials to identify
particular animals that have been exposed to a contagious disease and isolate them in order to prevent the disease from becoming more widespread.

2. Maintain equine commerce and movement of horses in the case of a disease outbreak. Disease outbreaks can stop all movement and commerce regarding livestock, including horses. This has been clearly demonstrated with the foot and mouth outbreak in the U.K., the recent discovery of BSE in the U.S. and the outbreaks of Vesicular Stomatitis in the U.S.

3. Assist equestrian events in ensuring a healthy environment for participating horses. Most major events involving livestock in the U.S. require some sort of certification, including negative Coggins test. A National ID system could enhance these requirements by having better systems to insure the health of the animals involved.

4. Expedite recovery and identification of horses in case of loss due to natural disaster, theft or accident. A permanent ID system for horses could be used in emergency situations to link the horse to a premise. In addition, the ID system could be utilized in case of a theft to facilitate return of the animals to the owner.

5. Facilitate import and export of equine. Many horses are exported and imported into the U.S. each year. A positive national identification system could expedite these processes and allow for more effective means of identifying the animals moving internationally.

6. Uphold the horse industry as a responsible member of the livestock community. The importance of the horse industry in cooperating with the entire livestock industry in the case of a disease outbreak cannot be overstated. The implementation of an ID system for the equine industry would allow the industry to work in concert with other members of the livestock industry to quickly trace back diseased or exposed animals.

Furthermore, the ESWG has made the following recommendations to the USDA:

**Recommendation #1:** All horses are susceptible to equine infectious diseases. Any horses that are transported interstate, or commingled with other horses or livestock intrastate must be identified with an official form of identification.

**Recommendation #2:** Any national or state equine identification program should be voluntary in the initial implementation period to insure the opportunity to properly test the components of the
system, and allow sufficient time for an educational campaign on the parameters and benefits of the program to increase participation. Provided FOIA issues are resolved to industry satisfaction, mandatory equine identification should not be implemented before 2010 unless events necessitate earlier compliance.

**Recommendation #3:** Horses are livestock, and should be held to the same standards as other livestock species. However, the USDA must recognize the unique characteristics of the equine industry in the development of NAIS. With respect to the other species in the NAIS, horses are different. Case in point, horses:

1. Have longest life expectancy of livestock species (20 –35 years).
2. Are generally more valuable on an individual basis.
3. Are transported more often and for greater distances.
4. Participate in internationally recognized competitions including the Olympics.
5. Require accurate identification to insure the integrity of a multi-billion dollar racing industry with state regulated pari-mutuel wagering.
6. Are imported and exported on a regularly basis at significant expense.
7. Are at great risk of theft.
8. And, are in many instances already properly identified by the appropriate breed registry or horse identification services.

**Recommendation #4:** The components of a national horse identification program, which provides for horse identification, traceability and trace-back should provide definitive benefits to equine industry that justify the costs to stakeholders.

**Recommendation #5:** In order to have the option to have a national equine identification program that is internationally compatible and especially with Canada and Mexico, the ESWG must work in close cooperation with the Animal Identification Number (AIN) Managers for equines. The appropriate equine registries and other databases recording the identification of equines should be designated as AIN distributors, and immediately notified when an AIN is assigned to a specific equine.

**Recommendation #6:** Horse identification data/information must be kept confidential and exempt from current FOIA requirements including a FOIA exemption to block data from passing among varied governmental agencies. Only approved federal and state animal health authorities will have access to any state or federally managed database where the NAIS
information essential to the enhancement of animal disease surveillance and monitoring is maintained.

Recommendation #7: Definition of Equine Premises: An equine premise is an identifiable physical location that represents a unique and describable geographic location where horses are boarded, stabled, or kept with other horses.

Recommendation #8: The identification of certain equine premises is at a higher priority with respect to potential for disease transmission, and therefore requires greater disease monitoring and surveillance. The following list is prioritized to represent equine premises for reporting purposes, including but not limited to:

- Ports of Entry
- Quarantine Facilities
- Auctions and Sales
- Breeding Farms
- Boarding Facilities
- Training Facilities
- Equine Clinics and Hospitals
- Racetracks
- Show/Exhibition/Competition Facilities
- Public and Private Stables
- Rodeo Arenas
- Fairgrounds
- National or State Parks
- Universities (Educational/Research Facilities/Diagnostic Laboratories)
- Ports of Exit
- Dude Ranches

Recommendation #9: The premises manager is the owner or his/her designee who is responsible for recording and reporting the identification of horses moved onto or off of the premises; and must submit the necessary information (premises identification, horse identification numbers, time and date of entry and exit, and event code) to the national database in a timely basis as designated by USDA NAIS. The premises manager must submit the information to the national database within 24 hours of being notified of a disease outbreak that threatens horses.
Recommendation #10: When horses are transported interstate, intrastate when commingled with other horses or livestock, or to premises or events where a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) or other equine health papers such as Coggins are required, the movement must be reported to the appropriate USDA NAIS database(s).

Recommendation #11: To enhance disease surveillance through a successful identification and tracking program, standardized requirements for Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) must be established among the states. At the time of veterinary inspection, any horse that has not been previously identified or assigned an Animal Identification Number shall be identified with an official form of identification that includes the animal identification number, any electronic identification and a more complete description of the horse’s coat color, white markings, any unique identifying marks including cowlicks, brands and tattoos; and whenever possible, digital photographs.

Recommendation #12: Those with inquiries, recommendations or grant proposals pertaining to a national equine identification program should be encouraged to contact to the Equine Species Working Group for collaboration.

Recommendation #13:
Whenever appropriate, equine identification systems currently in use should be incorporated into the national equine identification program, especially radio frequency identification devices (RFID), normally microchips. Existing microchips should be incorporated into the NAIS for equines.

At this time, the ISO/ANSI compatible RFID chip (11784/85, 134.2 kHz) is the recommended standard of electronic equine identification for the purpose of disease control for the uniformity and compatibility necessary to successfully achieve the goals of the USDA National Animal Identification System. The recommended implantation site for the microchip is the nuchal ligament on the left side, in the middle third of the neck, halfway between the ears and the withers. Those horses already identified, for example with a 125 kHz microchip, will not be required to implant again, instead the microchip number will be linked to the animal’s assigned AIN within the database.
Recommendation #14: New technologies should be pursued and researched to provide more efficient, cost effective and accurate methods of equine identification, i.e., Biometrics, DNA Testing, etc.

Recommendation #15: To ensure that the horse owners and industry stakeholders do not unduly bear the costs of the development and implementation of a national equine identification program, the USDA should provide adequate funding in 2005-2006 for cooperative agreements with states and tribes that include equine field trials recommended by the ESWG, and adequate funding in 2006-2007 for assistance to begin implementation of the National Equine Identification Program.

Recommendation #16: The ESWG should be allowed to contract with a consortium of horse industry stakeholders to design, develop and maintain an independent equine industry database for equine data/information necessary to provide horse identification, traceability and trace-back capabilities for the NAIS.

Recommendation #17: The buyer and seller shall mutually be responsible to report any change of ownership of an equine to the appropriate equine registries and other databases recording the identification of equines.

Though it has yet to be determined exactly what methods will be used to individually identify horses, individual animal ID will be a requirement for all horses in the not so distance future. However, before animal identification can take place, all premises housing horses must be registered and assigned a premise ID number. The current suggested time line from the USDA for implementation of both phases of NAIS is as follows.

- All states capable of premises registration - July, 2005 (47 as of 5/05)
- Animal Identification Number system operational - July, 2005
- Premises registration and animal identification “alerts” - April, 2007
- Premises registration and animal identification required - January, 2008
- Reporting of defined animal movements required; entire program mandatory - January, 2009
For more information about NAIS visit the following web sites.
American Horse Council       http://www.horsecouncil.org/equineid.htm
Animal ID 2004 Information Expo
Illinois Dept. of Ag. Premise ID registration   http://www.agr.state.il.us/premiseid
Wisconsin Dept of Ag. Premise ID registration
http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/ah/agriculture/animals/premises/premises_registration.jsp