

NAIS and Horses:

*The facts surrounding the
National Animal Identification
System as it applies to the
horse industry in the U.S.*



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Mission, Purpose and Actions of the Equine Species Working Group

It is important that horse owners, and the horse industry in general, understand the purpose and actions of the Equine Species Working Group (ESWG) and what it has and has not done to date. First, the ESWG has not endorsed the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) or its application to the equine community. A final decision on whether the horse industry should participate in a national ID system must await a definitive proposal from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding how the NAIS might apply to the horse industry and individual horse owners. That is still some time away. In addition, no equine organization has taken a formal position specifically supporting the NAIS' application to the equine industry.

Nonetheless, based upon the ESWG's understanding of the development of the NAIS, the system's purpose, and a review of the statements and proposals made by USDA and the federal legislation calling for a comprehensive national ID system, the ESWG believes that a system in some form will become mandatory in the future and will likely be applied to the equine industry.

It is for this reason that the ESWG was formed. As explained more fully elsewhere in this document, the horse industry determined that it was better to involve itself in crafting the proposed system, rather than simply allowing it to be imposed on the industry. Simply stated, the ESWG was formed to evaluate the NAIS and the potential benefits and costs of the system to the equine industry in order to make reasonable and informed recommendations to USDA regarding how the equine industry might be included in the program should it become mandatory. The ESWG is committed to make recommendations for a system that recognizes the uniqueness of the equine industry and, to the extent possible, minimally affects current practices and procedures.

To accomplish this mission, it is critical that the ESWG receive active input from each member organization and individual horse owners. As broad a group as possible was involved in this process through the ESWG to ensure that disparate views and expert opinions were available. It is also critical that the ESWG hear from the industry at large. In order to receive serious comments and suggestions it is important that the ESWG keep the equine industry informed about the NAIS and the working group's activities so that any recommendations that ultimately come out of the group will be supported by the broadest possible segment of the horse industry.

Finally, it is important that individual horse owners and organizations recognize that they may participate in the process by directly contacting the USDA and state agencies with their opinions, views and suggestions. Since federal and state agencies are involved in initiating the system, the public has a continued right to provide input directly to their federal and state officials.

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I. Introduction

April 2006

Dear Members of the Horse Industry,

There has been considerable discussion of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) in the horse industry. This is a national system designed to identify livestock, including horses, livestock premises and track animal movement so that a major disease or bio-terrorist attack could be quickly contained and eradicated.

The Equine Species Working Group (ESWG) acknowledges that the National Animal Identification System has created many questions within the horse industry. The ESWG was created to represent the horse industry's interest in the National Animal Identification System. At the time of formation of the group, there was a blank section titled "Horse Identification" included in a document entitled "The United States Animal Identification Plan" which has become the NAIS. It became clear to many of us that if we didn't organize and take on the task of working within the plan and formulating recommendations to the USDA outlining parameters the horse industry could operate within should NAIS become mandatory, the USDA would simply impose a system on the horse industry. While we realize this is not a popular issue, we also realize that the misinformation and rumors that are running rampant through the horse industry are creating problems and hindering a fair reading of what may happen.

Is this an easy issue to address? No. As the NAIS is currently presented are horses likely to be a part of it? Yes. Did the USDA take comments on the NAIS as presented? Yes, and the ESWG has submitted comments. (See page 7.) We also put out press releases and members submitted information to industry publications regarding the open comment period.

The ESWG presents this information with the hope that those who own horses in the United States will read it, inform themselves of the facts and become a part of the process. After reading the following information, locate your representative on the Equine Species Working Group and discuss your suggestions, concerns and ideas regarding this issue, or contact the USDA and your state officials directly.

Respectfully,

Equine Species Working Group

II. History of the National Animal Identification System

The National Animal Identification System grew out of a long history of animal identification in the United States. It is not the start of a new animal identification plan but rather the culmination of years of experience dealing with lots of separate identification systems.

Animal identification first became a part of the American livestock landscape back in the 1800s and early 1900s when branding of cattle and horses was a primary form of identification to determine ownership and to deter theft. Today, many states continue to have brand inspection laws that apply when livestock are moved.

One of the earliest federal identification systems was instituted by the predecessor agency of the United States Department of Agriculture soon after the end of World War I in an extensive effort to eradicate Bovine Tuberculosis. Vaccinated animals were identified with an official tag and ear tattoo. Over the years, those tagged animals were permitted to move while unvaccinated animals were not. Since that time, the USDA and the federal agencies governing animal health before it, have implemented different systems for identifying animals when establishing disease programs for cattle, swine, sheep and goats. Even horses that are found to be positive for Equine Infectious Anemia receive an official identification.

As far back as the 1960s, livestock industry leaders began to talk about developing a set of national standards for animal identification in the U.S. By the 1980s, discussions of a national system of animal identification were bringing industry leaders together from around the world. In the 1980s, the U.S. Animal Health Association (USAHA) also began to emphasize the need for modernization of animal identification in the U.S. in order to make it more systematic and beneficial to livestock owners and to help prepare the country in the event of a national animal health emergency, such as the introduction of Foot and Mouth Disease. By the late 1980's, it was recognized that animals moved to more places and more rapidly than ever in the history of the world. Horses, for example, are shipped to many different states for competition and can be back on their own farm in only a few weeks, often before the incubation period of disease can be completed.

However, it wasn't until 2002 that a crucial step forward was made. After years of discussion and debate, livestock industry leaders agreed that the best way to avert a national animal health and economic disaster in the face of a devastating disease outbreak was to have an effective and workable system of identification that would facilitate animal disease traceback. It was also recognized that a national system could not work without the full cooperation of industry, state animal health officials and the federal government. A National Identification Development Team was formed and included 100 animal and livestock industry professionals representing more than 70 organizations, associations and government agencies. In 2003 the first draft of a National Animal Identification Plan was produced and presented to the U.S. Animal Health Association, where it was accepted and *a resolution passed asking that the U.S. Department of Agriculture make the standards official.*

In 2004, nearly 500 stakeholders attended the ID/INFO EXPO hosted by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA), one of the highest attended of the many industry meetings held on identification throughout the years. The interest was prompted by the announcement that the first case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, Mad Cow Disease) was diagnosed in the U.S. This diagnosis highlighted the need for a workable national system of identification. In the effort to traceback the origins of the affected cow, as well as to identify her four offspring, all but one animal was found. The fourth, a bull-calf, was traced to a herd of about 400 calves. Since authorities could not determine which of those four hundred was the affected calf, all were destroyed.

NAIS History (continued)

The identification of the BSE-positive cow in the U.S. focused the interest of Congress and the general public on the issue of animal identification. The USDA established a new program called the National Animal Identification System under which the national standards for animal identification will be implemented. The authority for USDA to establish a program already existed and did not need Congressional approval.

The purpose of the NAIS is as it relates to horses:

- To establish a national system to identify those horses and equine premises that are part of the system and to record animal movements for purposes of disease control only.
- To allow the “trace back” within 48 hours of a confirmed diagnosis of a serious animal disease to ensure rapid containment of the disease.
- To ensure animal health in the U.S. and our ability to move and market our horses. Movement is particularly important to the horse industry.

The NAIS would require the following information if it becomes mandatory:

- An identification number for each horse that is included in the system.
- An identification number for each premises that holds or manages horses that are included in the system.
- A tracking system, involving a location, time and date stamp, so that horses included in the system could be “traced” to their current location in the event of a major disease outbreak. This would require reporting to a National Animal Records Repository.

How has the horse industry responded?

The American Horse Council organized a Task Force to review what was then called the U.S. Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) in 2003. That Task Force has evolved into the Equine Species Working Group (ESWG), which has been designated by USDA as the official equine group to develop recommendations regarding how the equine industry might fit into the NAIS.

The ESWG includes thirty-five representatives of the horse industry and animal health officials. A complete list is included in this document. It is co-chaired by Dan Fick, Executive Vice-President of The Jockey Club, Dr. Marvin Beeman of Littleton, Colorado, past President of the American Association of Equine Practitioners, and Amy Mann, Director of Health and Regulatory Affairs at the American Horse Council.

The ESWG has been evaluating the overall plan for two years to ensure that the horse industry’s specific concerns are addressed. The group continues to weigh NAIS’ benefits against its potential costs and is working to determine how the industry might develop standards for equine identification that would fit into the NAIS with as little disruption as possible should it become mandatory. The Equine Species Working Group has not endorsed the NAIS but is trying to work with the USDA to come up with recommendations if the USDA does decide that equine ID will be mandatory.

NAIS History (continued)

General original recommendations from the ESWG to the UDSA

The ESWG has also spelled out and supported several “general principles” as a condition precedent to the horse industry's involvement with NAIS.

These include:

- The initiation of the NAIS should first be on a voluntary basis.
- Any system should first apply to food animals.
- All components of the system must be in place and have been tested before making any system mandatory. There should be a transition period from voluntary to mandatory for the horse Industry.
- It should not apply to the horse industry until 2010.
- The confidentiality of data collected pursuant to a national animal ID system must be protected. There must be a clear exclusion of this information from the Freedom of Information Act public disclosure requirements.
- A national animal ID system should not increase the role and size of the federal government.
- If such a system is mandated by federal and state authorities, the major costs should not be borne by the horse industry. Federal and state authorities have an obligation to provide the majority of the funding for the system since it will ultimately be required by state and federal law and provides a public service.

III. Why Should the Horse Industry Participate in Developing an Acceptable NAIS?

Some horse owners are suggesting that the horse industry should simply oppose the inclusion of horses in the national ID system. Others argue that we should not participate in developing recommendations that explain the uniqueness of the industry because by doing so it indicates support of NAIS thus limiting our ability to oppose it.

That is a dangerous approach to a national initiative with broad support at the federal and state level and in the livestock industry in general.

It is highly unlikely that the horse industry will be given the opportunity to “opt out.” As described elsewhere in this document, the original concept of the NAIS was that it would apply to all livestock. It would be politically difficult to have horses excluded. The federal and state authorities and the broader livestock community, which first proposed a national ID system, expect that horses will be included within any system that becomes mandatory.

Why? Because there are diseases that affect both horses and other livestock. A system that does not include horses would not be as effective and may not satisfy the goals of agriculture and the livestock community. In addition, there are diseases that horses can spread to humans and raise bio-terrorism concerns. For these reasons it is unrealistic to expect that federal and state authorities will organize a national system intended to identify and trace livestock diseases of importance within 48 hours without including all the species potentially affected.

In addition, the horse industry wants to remain a part of the livestock industry, not separate itself. Congress, the USDA, state legislators and officials and the livestock industry itself consider horses to be livestock. The horse industry has worked hard at the federal, state and local level to remain within the “livestock” category. There are advantages to being classified as livestock with respect to agricultural classifications and assistance, federal funds for research on equine diseases, favorable tax provisions, animal welfare laws and regulations, zoning restrictions and similar requirements.

Finally, the USDA has authority now to implement a mandatory national identification system under the Animal Health Protection Act, which was passed by Congress to clarify and strengthen the USDA’s authority to prevent, control and eradicate animal diseases. Under that Act, “livestock” is defined to include “all farm-raised animals.” That includes horses. The industry would have to convince Congress to amend that law to specifically exclude horses from USDA’s current authority to regulate in this area.

Over ten bills have been introduced in Congress directing the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a nationwide electronic livestock identification system that will enable the USDA to enhance the speed and accuracy of the response to outbreaks of disease in livestock. All these bills, except one, apply to livestock born in the United States or imported and cover the movement of livestock in both interstate commerce and intra-state commerce. That includes horses. And even the one bill that does not specifically apply to horses provides for their voluntary inclusion in any system.

Just as important, there are potential positive reasons to participate in a system that is crafted by the industry itself and accommodates the differences and particularities of the horse industry. These benefits are listed elsewhere.

Why Should the Horse Industry Participate in Developing an Acceptable NAIS? (continued)

In summary, there is no assurance that the horse industry could convince Congress, the USDA, and state authorities to exclude horses from any system should it become mandatory. To the contrary, using all the industry's resources to simply oppose the inclusion of horses in NAIS could result in a system that would be more burdensome to horse owners. The goal of the ESWG is not to include all horses and all movements in the NAIS. Rather it is to ensure that federal and state authorities understand what horse ownership and enjoyment involves, and what it would mean to require the identification of every horse, the reporting of every movement and why the industry would oppose that. Indeed, by participating in crafting the application of the system to the uniqueness of the horse industry, it is more likely that more horses will be excluded than included.

For these reasons it is important that the horse industry, through the ESWG, develop its own national ID plans under the parameters of the NAIS. If we don't do it, others will do it for us.

IV. Equine Diseases of Concern

The NAIS is a tool that is being developed to ensure the health of the national livestock herds by facilitating the traceback and traceforward of animals associated with a significant disease outbreak. Often, when the topic of the NAIS is raised a familiar refrain is heard: “why are horses included? They don’t carry diseases that affect humans or other livestock.” An informational paper was developed with the intention of examining that question and determining whether it is accurate. The paper can be found on the ESWG website, and some key points extracted from that paper are below.

Although rarely experienced in the U.S., horses are in fact susceptible to numerous diseases that can also affect people. In most cases, horses do not play a role in spreading these diseases to humans. Lyme disease is an example of a disease that affects horses and humans but horses do not give Lyme disease to humans. In some cases, horses serve as sentinels for human disease surveillance. For example, West Nile Fever and Eastern and Western Equine Encephalomyelitis are diseases that frequently appear in horses before cases are seen in humans. However, horses can also contract infectious diseases that they can pass on or transmit to humans. Examples of zoonotic diseases of horses include Rabies, Salmonella, Ringworm, Leptospirosis, Brucellosis, and Anthrax. There are also several diseases that are common to horses and to other livestock species as well as humans, which are considered multispecies. For more detailed information on these diseases please refer to the full paper found on the ESWG website.

It is directly attributable to the high quality of equine management and care in this country and the extensive effort to eradicate these diseases from the U.S. horse population or prevent their occurrence that horse owners in the U.S. are unlikely to contract any of the diseases mentioned above and in the paper. Nonetheless, horse owners should be aware of the zoonotic significance of each of these diseases and the potential for their occurrence in horses.

Imported Diseases

Import quarantine and post-entry testing are important components in thwarting the introduction of foreign animal diseases, such as Glanders, but it does not entirely guarantee that these diseases could not appear here, either through natural or intentional introduction. Vector-borne diseases such as Venezuelan Equine Encephalomyelitis and Vesicular Stomatitis can be introduced without necessarily importing infected animals.

Emerging Diseases

Emerging diseases are always a concern. Although it is rare for viruses to jump from one species to another, it does happen. Recently, equine influenza virus was isolated from greyhound racing dogs in Florida after the animals began to show signs of respiratory illness. This has not been seen before and indicates that, in this case, the equine flu virus may have mutated enough to jump species.

Conclusion

Because the horse industry and horse owners are so protective of their animals, most diseases are well-controlled in the U.S. Nonetheless, some equine diseases do have public health impacts. Horse owners must be knowledgeable and aware of the diseases that are common to horses and other livestock species and to humans. A severe outbreak of any of these diseases would have a substantial veterinary and economic impact in the U.S., and on the horse industry.

V. Methods of Identification

How Will Horses Be Identified?

The ESWG recommends that should the NAIS become mandatory it begin by incorporating existing methods of identification, including breed registration numbers, DNA parentage, brands, lip tattoos and radio frequency identification devices (RFID), including already-implanted microchips.

Clearly, RFID or microchips appear to be the most efficient way to identify animals, including horses, and this will likely be the identification method of choice in the future. New technologies should also continue to be pursued to provide more efficient, cost effective and accurate methods of identification. The ESWG expects that the technical and scientific community will respond to the industry's needs, rather than horse owners and the industry limiting themselves to what is presently available.

Radio Frequency Identification Devices (microchips) for Equines

The ESWG suggests that any horse owner or regulatory authority considering the use of microchips thoroughly research all aspects of microchips in making their decision. If the decision is made to utilize microchips, the ESWG recommends that, from now on, the ISO/ANSI compatible RFID chip (11784/85, 134.2 kHz) be the recommended standard of electronic equine identification not only to control disease but also to ensure the uniformity and compatibility necessary to achieve the goals of the NAIS. This microchip will provide compatibility with RFID tags and scanners used on other livestock under the NAIS and with the microchip technology being utilized for horses internationally, especially in North America and the European Union. Anyone considering the purchase of a scanner or microchip reader should consider one that can read both 125 and 134 kHz microchips.

Any microchip should be implanted in the horse's nuchal ligament on the left side, in the middle third of the neck, halfway between the ears and the withers.

The Need for New Technology

As previously stated, microchips are only one aspect of proper horse identification, and should be utilized in conjunction with all other horse identification systems currently in place including lip tattoos and freeze brands. The methods of identifying livestock for disease control is a maturing area that is likely to continue to develop as new technical changes and more efficient means of identification are introduced. RFID reader and scanner manufacturers and suppliers should make an immediate effort to provide readers and scanners that can read ISO/ANSI 11784/11785 livestock microchips and that can read or at least detect all 125 kHz frequency companion animal microchips. In addition, the ESWG recommends that new technologies be pursued and researched to provide more efficient, cost effective and accurate methods of equine identification, i.e., Biometrics, DNA Testing, etc.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A NATIONAL EQUINE ID PROGRAM

There has been a broad call from industry, regulators, lawmakers, trade partners, and others to identify livestock in order to facilitate disease management in the case of a disease outbreak. The Equine Species Working Group has come with up with potential benefits of a system if developed by the horse industry.

The overall goal and main benefit of a national, standardized equine identification program in the United States, if it becomes mandatory and is implemented, is disease management. But there are also other benefits to horse owners, including:

◆ **Reduce potential effect and enhance control of equine disease outbreaks.** A national identification system for equines in the United States 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.

◆ **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 United States and the outbreaks of Vesicular Stomatitis. In recent months, some states have closed their borders to horses from a specific state, due to the lack of confidence in that states' ability to track and contain a specific disease. With a national tracking system, state animal health officials will have the greater ability to identify specific locations and animals where a disease may be prevalent, thus eliminating embargoes of an entire state's population of horses or others animals.

◆ **Assist equestrian events in ensuring a healthy environment for participating horses.** Most major events involving livestock in the United States require some sort of health certification, including negative Coggins Test. A National ID system could enhance these requirements by having better systems to ensure the health of the animals involved. Kentucky has recently been awarded the privilege of hosting the 2010 World Equestrian Games. Individual animal identification will be a requirement for all equines participating and a necessity in tracking and maintaining a disease prevention program during the games and beyond.

◆ **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, owner, or caretaker. Hurricane Katrina was an example of how effective individual animal identification could be, with virtually all displaced horses being returned to their rightful owner, which was not the case with many other species. In addition, the ID system could be utilized in the case of a theft to facilitate return of the animals to the owner.

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

◆ **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.

Potential benefits of a National Equine ID Program (continued)

- ◆ **Bio-Thermal microchips can be beneficial to horse owners.** These chips combine both the ease of recording temperatures with the individual identification of a horse, which is necessary to maintain a viable disease management system. Temperatures are the first sign of any infection and the first step in stopping the transmission of a disease. In a quarantine situation the bio-thermal microchip is a quick and efficient way to take temperatures with minimum risk of spreading the contamination

VII. Current Status of NAIS

Status of NAIS

The NAIS is in its initial stages, even for the food animals that are the primary focus of the USDA's proposal, such as cattle. The section in the NAIS on horses is literally blank, although its existence indicates that USDA expects to include horses in the system.

Some rules have been changed at the federal level to begin the organization of the NAIS. Most states have begun the process of requiring the registration of livestock premises, including those with horses. Nonetheless, there are still many administrative and legislative steps that must be taken before the NAIS is operating, much less mandated.

There is ample time for horse owners and equine organizations to provide their views to federal and state officials regarding the identification system's possible application to the horse industry should it become mandatory for horses. But it is critical that horse owners and equine organizations provide their views in a reasoned and logical fashion.

The NAIS will be established over time through the integration of three key components: premises identification, animal identification, and animal tracking. NAIS is currently a voluntary program. The intent is to develop requirements for participation that not only meet the ability to maintain the health of the national herd but also provide a program that is practical for producers and all others involved in production. To this end, USDA has adopted a phased-in approach to implementation. Although a draft strategic plan published in 2005 references mandatory requirements in 2008 and beyond, *to date no actions have been initiated by USDA to develop regulations to require participation in NAIS.* APHIS will publish updates to the implementation plan as recommendations are received and evaluated by the NAIS Subcommittee and the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Foreign Animal and Poultry Diseases.

The *immediate priority* is premises registration. Premises registration takes place at the state level. Some states, such as Wisconsin, have legislation making premises registration mandatory. Animal identification is slated for implementation in early 2006 with official tags becoming available *for cattle.*

Premises Registration

Registration of premises is determined by state authorities. A premises is defined as a physical location that represents a unique and describable geographic entity where activity affecting the health and/or traceability of animals may occur. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has amended the regulations to recognize for official use the 7-character Premises Identification Number (PIN). Only a limited amount of information is stored in the national premises identification system: Premises ID Number, Name of Entity, Owner or Appropriate Contact Person, Street Address, City, State, Zip/Postal Code, Contact Phone Number, Operation Type (e.g., production unit, exhibition, etc.), Date Activated, Date Retired (e.g., date operation is sold, date operation is no longer maintaining livestock) and Reason Retired. The number of animals or the types of animals is not required.

All 50 states, two territories and five Native American Tribes are currently registering premises as part of the NAIS.

Current Status of NAIS (continued)

Animal Identification

In early March of 2005, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced plans to begin allocating animal identification numbers (AINs) to tag manufacturers and approving visual identification tags for use under the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), paving the way for distribution of these tags to producers. *The initial implementation of AINs focuses on cattle.* The use of AINs with other types of identification devices (e.g., implants) used in other species will be considered as the NAIS species working groups finalize their recommendations for utilizing the AIN.

National Movement Tracking

To protect the health of the U.S. herd, sound scientific principles indicate that being able to track and contain a disease within 48 hours is essential. Knowing where animals are located is the key to efficient, accurate, and cost-effective epidemiologic investigations and disease-control efforts. The ability to achieve the 48-hour traceback objective will be directly affected by the percentage of animal movements that can be recorded. Collecting animal movement information is possibly the most challenging component of the NAIS.

Not all movements will need to be reported but those that involve the commingling of animals that originate from lots of different places present the greatest opportunity for disease introduction and spread. The different locations of these animals as they move will be recorded to aid traceback but only a few basic pieces of information will be required: the AIN or Group/Lot ID, the premises number of the receiving location, and the date of the animal's or animals' arrival. This information will not be housed by the Federal Government but rather in private databases. Which database(s) will house the movement data has not been determined as yet.

ESWG Update

The current focus of the ESWG is moving forward with the implementation of premises and animal identification, which are important steps in protecting our industry. The ESWG recommendation for animal identification is discussed in the previous section on microchips. The working group is also focusing on possible pilot projects to evaluate how an identification system may benefit the equine industry. There are multiple steps to the NAIS implementation process, and the ESWG is carefully monitoring the progress of the NAIS and is ensuring that the horse industry's voice is heard.

VIII. Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the NAIS?

A: The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is a program intended to identify animals and record their movements for the purpose of disease control. The ultimate goal of this identification system is to create an effective, uniform national animal tracing system that will help maintain the health of U.S. herds and flocks. When fully operational, it will allow animal tracing to be completed within 48 hours of disease detection, ensuring rapid containment of the disease, protecting our country's animals and allowing for continued commerce.

Q: What is the ESWG?

A: Equine Species Working Group (ESWG) is the task force officially recognized by the USDA to evaluate the concept of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) and its application to the equine industry. The group's responsibility is to develop recommendations for a national equine identification plan that is in the best interests of, and protects the rights of, horse owners and breeders. The ESWG has submitted comments and continuously updated recommendations to USDA that distinguish the horse industry from other livestock, pointing out the unique characteristics of the industry and outlining our positions and concerns with a national ID program.

Q: Is the ESWG a committee of the American Horse Council?

A: No. The ESWG is an independent coalition of over 30 National Equine Organizations. The American Horse Council is one of the many members of the ESWG and as such is involved in evaluating the NAIS and developing recommendations on how the horse industry might fit into the program.

Q: Why is the ESWG reviewing any plan to include equines in the NAIS?

A: The ESWG is engaged because if the horse industry does not participate in the evaluation and development, a national system could be forced upon the industry without its input. The purpose of the NAIS is to protect the livestock industry in case there is an outbreak of a potentially catastrophic animal disease or an attack of bio-terrorism. Either scenario could result in a significant loss to the horse industry and seriously limit horse owners' abilities to move or export their horses. There is strong support for NAIS at USDA, in Congress, with the state animal health authorities and within the livestock industry. The ESWG believes that it is in the best interests of the horse industry to work with those instituting NAIS to be sure that our industry's specific concerns are understood and considered in case the plan becomes mandatory.

Q. Does the NAIS currently explain how it might apply to horses?

A. No. There is currently no section explaining how equines might fit within the requirements of the NAIS. The section on horses is blank. Some horse owners are apparently reading the information presently on the USDA website describing the NAIS and its application to cattle and other species and concluding that the requirements apply to the horse industry. That is not the case. The possible application of the NAIS to horses has not been formulated.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Q: Is the effort to create an equine identification plan linked in any way to the slaughter of horses for human consumption or meat quality?

A: NO. The plan is being formulated as a way to identify animals involved in an outbreak of serious infectious or contagious diseases that may spread rapidly among horses, other livestock or humans. The slaughter of horses for human consumption has not been a part of the discussions and the members of the ESWG include associations that support a ban on the slaughter of horses, organizations that oppose a ban on the slaughter of horses for human consumption and organizations that do not have a position on the ban on slaughter of horses for human consumption. The American Horse Council which originally organized the task force is neutral on the bills to ban slaughter of horses. The NAIS is intended to protect animals from disease as well as to identify those that have a disease or may have been exposed to a disease so that they may be treated quickly and minimize the economic impact of the disease outbreak.

Q: Since horses are not used for human consumption in the U.S., why should the horse industry be involved in the NAIS?

A: The NAIS is about the health of our nation's livestock, not just food safety. The horse industry is an integral part of this nation's livestock community and as such has a responsibility to consider a national livestock program that will benefit it as well as other livestock industries. The horse industry benefits from being a part of the livestock industry through tax relief, disease control and research through the USDA and disaster funding.

Q: Are there diseases that affect horses that also affect other livestock or humans?

A: Yes, there are several. Some diseases that affect horses, other livestock and even humans include rabies, salmonella, ringworm, anthrax, screwworm and vesicular stomatitis. More information on the different diseases that can affect not only horses but other livestock and humans can be found in the diseases section of this booklet.

Q: Does the NAIS stop disease?

A: No. The NAIS is not a program that will stop disease, but is a program intended to stop the SPREAD of disease and to allow commerce and movement to continue if a disease outbreak does occur. The sooner animal health officials can identify infected and exposed animals and premises, the sooner they can contain the disease and stop its spread. This will also allow a quicker lifting of any restrictions on movement and commerce.

Q: Are there any bio-terrorism concerns involving equine diseases?

A: Several diseases of horses have long been recognized as capable of being used as a bio-terrorist weapon, such as glanders and Venezuelan Equine Encephalomyelitis. Glanders is a disease of horses, mules and donkeys and has not been found in the U.S. since the early 1900's. Glanders can be spread to humans through horses and was used by the German army in World War I to sicken enemy soldiers. In its bio-weapons program, the former Soviet Union was producing the bacterial agent that causes glanders even as late as the early 1980's. Glanders continues to exist in several third world countries, some of which have recently become members of the European Union. The U.S. requires that all horses imported into the U.S., including those temporarily exported for competition purposes, to be tested negative for glanders before being permitted to enter (or re-enter as the case may be) the domestic population.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Q: Will I have to report every time my horse moves off its premises?

A: Not EVERY single movement of your horse will have to be reported. This would obviously be an unrealistic goal. Movements such as local trail rides, shows or ropings would not be required reportable events. It is likely that the movements that would be reportable would be when horses are transported interstate or to a premises where a brand inspection, Certificate of Veterinary Inspection or other health papers are required.

Q: Is the NAIS going to be mandatory in 2008?

A: There are no regulations being developed at this time for the NAIS to be a nationally mandated program. It is currently proposed that it be implemented on a voluntary basis. The ESWG has recommended that the plan not be applied to the horse industry until 2010. However there are many states, such as Wisconsin with mandatory premises registration, that are developing their own legislation on certain components of the NAIS. It is recommended that you check with your state Department of Agriculture to learn more on how the state is currently implementing the NAIS and what its future plans are for the program's implementation.

Q: How do I get more information on the NAIS?

A: To find out more about the NAIS you can visit the following website: www.usda.gov/nais. You can also visit the ESWG website found on: www.horsecouncil.org. We also recommend that you contact your state Department of Agriculture to learn more on how your state is progressing with the implementation with the NAIS. Contact information for each state Departments of Agriculture can be found on the previously mentioned NAIS website.

IX. Equine Species Working Group Members

Tommy Azopardi
Texas Horsemen's Partnership
(512) 467-9799
Website: www.texashorsemen.com

Dr. Marvin Beeman
American Assn. of Equine Practitioners
(859) 233-0147
Website: www.aaep.org

Remi Bellocq
The National H.B.P.A., Inc.
(859) 259-0451
Website: www.hbpa.org

Paul Estok
Harness Tracks of America
(520) 529-2525
Website: www.harnesstracks.com

J. Amelita Facchiano
Dallas, TX 75238
(214) 348-2603

Dan Fick
The Jockey Club
(859) 224-2700
website: www.jockeyclub.com

Dr. L. B. Fleming
American Endurance Ride Conference
(530) 823-2260
Website: www.aerc.org

Cheryll Frank
American Saddlebred Horse Assoc.
(859) 259-2742
Website: www.saddlebred.com

Jerry Fruth
American Endurance Ride Conference
(530) 823-2260
Website: www.aerc.org

Debbie Fuentes
Arabian Horse Association
(303) 696-4500
Website: www.ArabianHorses.org

Dr. Pete G. Gibbs
Texas A&M University
(979) 85-1562
Website: www.tamu.edu

Dr. Mary Giddens
Federation of North American
Sport Horse Registries

Jim Gowen
Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau
(410) 398-2261
Website: www.trpb.com

Dr. Nancy E. Halpern
New Jersey Dept. of Agriculture
(609) 292-3965
Website: www.ag.state.nj.us

Peggy Hendershot
National Thoroughbred Racing Association
(859) 223-5444
Website: www.ntra.com

James Hickey, Jr.
American Horse Council
(202) 296-4031
Website: www.horsecouncil.org

Alan Hill
Back Country Horsemen of America
(888) 893-5161
Website: www.backcountryhorse.com

Charles Hulsey
Tennessee Walking Horse
Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association
(931) 359-1574
Website: www.twhbea.com

Frank Larrabee
Appaloosa Horse Club
(208) 882-5578
Website: www.appaloosa.com

Dr. Martha A. Littlefield
Louisiana Assistant State Veterinarian
(225)925-3980
Website: www.ldaf.state.la.us

Equine Species Working Group Members (continued)

(Continued)

Bob Luehrman
U. S. Trotting Association
(614) 224-2291
Website: www.ustrotting.com

Amy W. Mann
American Horse Council
(202) 296-4031
Website: www.horsecouncil.org

C. J. Marcello, Jr.
Paso Fino Horse Association
(813) 719-7777
Website: www.pfha.org

Jim Morehead
American Association of
Equine Practitioners
(859) 233-0147
Website: www.aaep.org

Lisa Owens
United States Equestrian Federation, Inc.
(859) 225-6966
Website: www.usef.org

Cindy Schonholtz
Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association
(719) 593-8840
Website: www.prorodeo.com

Andy Schweigardt
Thoroughbred Owners & Breeders Association
(859) 276-2291
Website: www.toba.org

Dr. Billy Smith
American Quarter Horse Association
(806) 376-4811
Website: www.aqha.org

Lex Smurthwaite
American Paint Horse Association
(817) 222-6403
Website: www.apha.com

Dr. Bob Stout
Kentucky Department of Agriculture
(502) 564-3956
Website: www.ky.gov

Ward Stutz
American Quarter Horse Association
(806) 376-4888
Website: www.aqha.org

David Switzer
Kentucky Thoroughbred Association
(859) 381-1414
Website: www.kta-ktob.com

Tim Turney
Kentucky Department of Agriculture
(502) 564-3956
Website: www.ky.gov

Dan Wall
National Reining Horse Association
(405) 946-7400
Website: www.nrha.com

Christine White
State of Michigan Office of Racing Commissioner
(517) 335-3403
Website: www.michigan.gov

USDA Resources:

Dr. Tim Cordes
National Animal Health Programs
USDA/APHIS/VS
(301) 734-3279
Website: www.aphis.usda.gov

Neil Hammerschmidt
USDA/APHIS/VS
(301) 734-5571
Website: www.aphis.usda.gov

Dr. Albert J. Kane
USDA:APHIS:VS
(970) 494-7234
Website: www.aphis.usda.gov