

NAIS: Protecting Animals, Livelihoods and Futures

*Bruce I. Knight, Under Secretary for
Marketing and Regulatory Programs
NAIS Community Outreach Event
Kansas City, MO
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Thanks, Ed (Curllett). Welcome to the NAIS Community Outreach Event.

Thank you for making NAIS a priority amidst the many competing responsibilities you have and for partnering with us to encourage farmers and ranchers to take the first step and register their premises. I especially appreciate those of you who are farmers and ranchers making time to join us.

We're excited about the new messages and materials we have to share with you this morning to encourage premises registration. Later you'll have opportunities to get some practice with them—and some of you already have.

Let me just say that I think the APHIS team has done a great job putting together themes, a new video and publications that are clear and compelling. Kudos and thanks to all of you.

Very shortly, APHIS also will be publishing a comprehensive user guide on NAIS in the *Federal Register* for comment. You'll be getting an advance copy, and Dr. Hammerschmidt will be talking more about that later this morning.

I want to emphasize that this is a working meeting—and everything you're receiving is a working draft. We listened to what you told us, and we've responded. Now, I want you to tell us if we got it right—or wrong.

For example, a number of you asked for species-specific materials—and you'll note we have those for you. However, I want to stress that what you see are mock-ups, not final printed pieces. There's still time to make changes. So, we're looking for your input as to what makes sense, what will reach producers in your state.

In short, we want to provide what will work for you. We also want to know if you need additional materials. So please share your candid feedback throughout this workshop.

Many of you in this room have worked hard and long to lay the foundation for the voluntary National Animal Identification System. From the beginning, our goal has been to create a practical system focused on animal health. We wanted a system that built on the work you've done and the partnerships and working relationships that are already in place.

We deeply appreciate the many hours you have devoted to helping us pull the pieces together to establish and refine the system so that it will work effectively for producers and all those in the livestock production chain.

Where We Stand

Thus far, USDA has invested around \$85 million in NAIS. The question you will be asked and the question I will be asked is: Where has that money gone and what do we have to show for it? The best answer is to get more premises registered and then move quickly to Phase II and Phase III.

Secretary Johanns has set some challenging goals for NAIS—including getting 25 percent of premises registered by the end of January 2007. Today, we have about 327,000 registered—out of 1.4 to 2.1 million premises. That takes us close to the first goal.

But the ultimate goal—having a critical mass of producers on board by the end of January 2009—will be much more challenging. And that's our priority for the next year. Hard work and the new communications material and strategy will be key.

Landing the Plane

The bottom line is that we need to complete what we've begun. NAIS is a system that only works to benefit animal health if there's data in the system.

We've got the structure. Now we've got to finish the job and convince everyone to take the first step and register their premises.

Some time ago, I attended a conference and heard a speaker put it this way: “You gotta land the plane.”

As he said, it’s not enough to complete a flawless take-off and follow the flight plan to your destination. You gotta land the plane.

For NAIS, we need to deliver on our promises. We’ve got to do more than just talk it up. We’ve got to follow through and close the deal. In short, we gotta land the plane. To land the plane, we have to earn their respect and trust and get farmers and ranchers to take the first step.

And that’s the point of this workshop—giving you tools, tips and themes that will help producers understand that participating in the voluntary NAIS is a safe, sound business decision for them. And I’ve taken the liberty of inviting some of those farm leaders here today to us that gut check.

We have to explain premises registration in a way that meets a common sense farmer’s test. In other words, will my friends and neighbors in Gann Valley, South Dakota, see that it makes sense for them to participate and register their premises?

Issues

We have a little turbulence to overcome. We’ve changed course a few times. And that’s left some folks confused or unsure.

The new education materials offer a clear purpose—protecting animal health—and a clear message: Registering your premises will protect your animals, your livelihood and your future. Registering also helps protect your neighbors—and that matters, too.

I think we need to be honest and open. We’ve made some changes in NAIS. It’s a system that has evolved, based on input from farmers and ranchers and your experience as our partners. We’ve been listening and making course corrections in line with what we’ve learned. I’ve heard that 75 to 80 percent of a pilot’s job is re-directing the plane to stay on course. We intend to stay on course, and we intend to land the plane.

We’re making it crystal clear that NAIS is voluntary—no if’s, and’s or but’s. Farmers can choose to register their premises. They can choose to participate in

individual animal or group identification. And they can opt to be part of tracking. Or not.

Of course, choosing not to participate may limit marketing opportunities in the future. As NAIS matures, I believe the marketplace will respond. To the extent that more information is available, they will demand it. That's because more information means greater security—and a premium for poultry and livestock whose history is readily available.

We're also emphasizing confidentiality. We WILL protect our farmers' private, confidential business information. Secretary Johanns has been very forthright and upfront about this. Producers need to be assured that we will stand firm on this and maintain their trust.

Conclusion

You've joined us today because you believe that American animal agriculture needs a modern system to protect animal health by enabling rapid traceouts and tracebacks when a disease outbreak occurs. NAIS is that system—provided we get farmers and ranchers to take the first step and register their premises.

Your partnership is absolutely essential in encouraging and facilitating premises registration. In turn, we have new materials to help you, to make your job easier. I know our folks are eager to share them with you and to do everything we can to help you.

In the end, NAIS will be successful because of your efforts to get farmers on board. It's all about following through and sealing the deal. We just gotta land the plane.

I look forward to working with you to do just that.