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USDA National Animal Identification (NAIS) Roundtable
Comments by Barry Carpenter, CEO
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USDA's Headquarters
Washington, DC

Thank you for providing the National Meat Association this opportunity to comment on the National Animal Identification System. National Meat Association represents the interests of meat packers and processors throughout the United States. The association has approximately 300 general member companies, all of whom potentially will be impacted by decisions made regarding an animal identification system. The negative impact of the absence of an effective system is real and potentially substantial.

For this reason, NMA strongly supports the implementation of animal identification system that works. For an animal ID program to truly be called a success it should (1) increase **disease control and eradication**, (2) provide a **vehicle to transfer information forward and backward in the supply chain**, (3) boost **consumer confidence** and (4) improve **access to export markets**.

Disease control and eradication – An animal ID system, implemented correctly, will mean the U.S. is prepared to effectively isolate and minimize any animal health or animal health related food safety issue. Failure to effectively control and eradicate a major animal disease will devastate our livestock industry.

Vehicle to transfer information in the supply chain – Verification from production to consumption, auditing and third party certification, confirmation of testing procedures, and agro terrorism prevention are other vital benefits to our food supply chain that can be derived from a properly implemented animal ID system.

Consumer confidence – An effective animal ID system demonstrates the industry's commitment to animal health and food safety which will boost consumer confidence. Further, the ability of the industry and USDA to quickly identify and control livestock associated with an animal health concern will minimize any related drop in consumer confidence.

Access to export markets – Meat exports are a significant contributor to the value of U.S. livestock. Following the finding of BSE in the U.S. in December 2003 we implemented numerous safeguards in our production and processing systems. Even with these safeguards that are recognized as effective by the OIE in place, our beef trade is still severely restricted in our historically major markets. The lack of an effective animal ID system is one of the major hurdles faced by U.S. trade negotiators as they try to regain market access.

A great deal of pressure already exists on packers to be able to provide trace back. Some have responded by implementing systems of their own via contractual arrangements or vertically integrated supply chains. However, market driven solutions are limited and will not likely fill the need for a comprehensive system. The driver of an effective animal ID system must be the unwavering support of producer organizations and, needless to say, the producers themselves.

A national animal ID system is long past due. Its absence leaves the livestock industry open to criticism from our detractors and U.S. producers are increasingly becoming disadvantaged in both domestic and foreign markets. Many of our trading partners and our competitors already have national identification systems of their own. If not implemented, the lack of an animal ID system will become the trade barrier of the future.

USDA has worked on the development and implementation of NAIS for over five years. These efforts have realized limited success. It is becoming increasingly clear with every passing year that the current strategy is not achieving timely results and is unlikely to be successful. If significant numbers of producers continue to resist the current efforts to implement a system to protect the U.S. livestock industry, USDA may be forced to require participation. Consequently, although NMA supports voluntary industry-led models, we understand that mandatory components maybe necessary to assure participation and compliance.

In closing, an effective animal ID system is essential for the future of the livestock industry. Collectively, the industry and USDA have the tools and the knowledge to implement a comprehensive, effective and functional system and Mr. Secretary with your leadership we can achieve this objective.