# New ID Plan Unveiled

## "Aggressive timeline" calls for 100% participation by 2009.

### by *Meghan Richey*

'One of the largest systematic changes ever faced by the livestock industry" now has an updated implementation strategy, complete with timelines and measurable benchmarks, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced at a press conference in early April.

That change, of course, is the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) — the premises registration, animal identification (ID) and animal movement-tracking system that will, by 2009, support 48-hour traceability to enhance the United States' response capabilities in an animal health emergency.

Setting an "aggressive timeline" to ensure full implementation by the 2009 deadline, Johanns' plan specifies benchmarks for incrementally accomplishing full system operation by 2007 and full producer participation by 2009.

A paper released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides the plan's details and also offers a contingency plan should participation not progress as anticipated. Participation in the NAIS is still voluntary, but if acceptable progress isn't made to reach the set benchmarks, the paper indicates that it could become a mandatory program.

## Progress achieved

Several important components of the plan have already been accomplished, including the full operation of premises registration in 50 states, five tribes and two territories, which was achieved in August 2005. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) estimates that 2 million premises, including locations that manage and/or hold livestock and poultry, exist in the U.S. that need to be registered by 2009. As of March 29, 2006, more than 235,800 premises had been registered — roughly 10% of total premises.

Another key component achieved was the full operation of the animal ID number (AIN) management system released in March 2006. The AIN is used to identify animals that move through the production chain independently, such as cattle, while the group/lot ID number (GIN) is used to identify animals that move in groups, such as hogs or poultry.

AINs, GINs and premises ID numbers (PINs) are to be recorded in privately owned and managed databases, which will also eventually record animal movement information.

## AIN distribution

With approximately 33 million calves born each year, the cattle industry represents the species with the largest population to be identified with AINs. Sheep, goats, deer and elk will also use AINs.
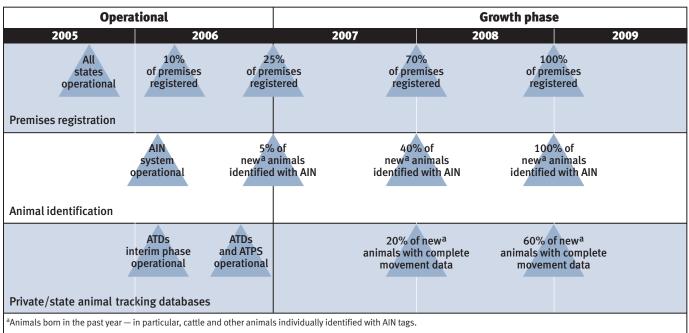
AINs are allocated to companies that manufacture or provide official ID devices or technologies. In April, two Web conferences were offered to organizations interested in distributing AINs either in the capacity of an AIN-tag manager or reseller. Jim Shirley, American Angus Association vice president of industry relations and director of commercial programs, participated in one of the conferences to explore the possibility of the Association distributing official ID tags with AINs. At this time, the Association does not provide NAIS-compliant AIN tags.

USDA has set benchmarks for identifying new animals with AINs. The department defines "new" animals as those "born in the past year, in particular cattle and other animals identified with AIN tags."

The first benchmark is for 5% of new animals to be identified with an AIN tag by January 2007. The benchmarks increase incrementally to full compliance in 2009,

## NAIS implementation timeline

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns released the following guidelines for measuring
successful implementation and participation in the National Animal Identification System (NAIS):

| Operational | | | Growth phase | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2005 | 2006 | | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
| **Premises registration** | | | | | |
| All states operational | 10% of premises registered | 25% of premises registered | 70% of premises registered | 100% of premises registered | |
| **Animal identification** | | | | | |
| | AIN system operational | 5% of new[a] animals identified with AIN | 40% of new[a] animals identified with AIN | 100% of new[a] animals identified with AIN | |
| **Private/state animal tracking databases** | | | | | |
| | ATDs interim phase operational | ATDs and ATPS operational | 20% of new[a] animals with complete movement data | 60% of new[a] animals with complete movement data | |

[a]Animals born in the past year — in particular, cattle and other animals individually identified with AIN tags.

with 100% of new animals — 40 million per year, of which 33 million are cattle — receiving AIN tags.

## Database details

Also released in April were the general technical standards for animal tracking databases (ATDs), which will enable the integration of the private databases with the NAIS. Private-database owners were invited to submit applications to USDA for system evaluation and offer feedback during the development of the final technical requirements. By June, USDA was to begin entering into cooperative agreements (CAs) with private and state database owners whose databases met the requirements. Database records will continue to be privately owned and managed, fulfilling Johanns' desire that the NAIS support price competition and innovation.

"By early next year, we will have the technology in place that will allow state and federal animal health officials to query the private databases during a disease investigation for information about animals of interest," Johanns explained. "We call it the Animal Trace Processing System (ATPS), more commonly known as the metadata system."

APHIS will work with stakeholders throughout 2006 to develop the complete requirements for the integration of private and state databases with the NAIS, with actual deployment of the ATPS anticipated for early 2007.

## Contingency plan

Countries such as Australia are using traceability as a marketing tool in an attempt to gain competitive advantage, Johanns reaffirmed. The USDA paper labeled market demands a potential "primary driver for achieving a successful level of participation in the NAIS."

"Allowing market forces and industry needs to drive producers' participation in the NAIS is preferable to mandatory federal regulations," the USDA paper reads.

However, the paper clearly explains that if marketplace pressure fails to spur an acceptable level of participation, the program's contingency plan could call for it to become mandatory.

"If you get out there and you have 50% of your [national] herd that's registered, 50% that's not registered, you don't really have an effective system," Johanns explained. "You have to be constantly hoping that if there's a disease outbreak, heaven forbid, that the disease outbreak occurs in the 50% that are

registered. And that's not a system. It is not a workable system."

In response to a reporter's inquiry, Johanns confirmed that USDA has the authority to make the program mandatory today and would not need new legislation from Congress. However, he said the department is not presently pursuing that action and would assess the industry's progress in meeting the set benchmarks before changing the program's status.

"In terms of our benchmarks, as we hit those benchmarks we'll evaluate how we're doing and that will really be what drives our next decision as to when and if we need to look at an approach that is the mandatory approach," he explained.

## Financial accountability

To date, USDA has "invested approximately $84 million into the system to assist in getting it up and running," Johanns said.

Yet, some stakeholders fear that amount of money hasn't accomplished enough to relieve their financial responsibility in the system's operation. "Resistance to the program is starting to grow among independent livestock growers, who see the funding of the entire program falling on their shoulders," Steve Hisey wrote in an article published April 10 on *meatingplace.com*.

Similarly, an article published by *Beef* magazine and distributed April 11 through its *Stocker Trends* electronic newsletter questioned the progress accomplished through the funding allocated to date. Of the

$84 million, at least $27 million was awarded directly to states and tribes to advance premises ID and registration, which USDA calls "the foundation of the system."

"Depending on your vantage point, that money hasn't bought much so far, other than getting about 10% of all livestock premises registered," the *Stocker Trends* article read.

Yet Johanns said the industry has made "significant strides," even though USDA's timeline calls for more than double the number of premises currently registered to be registered by the start of 2007.

"Some might look at that number and say, 'Gosh, 10% registered; that means 90% not registered. Are you really getting the job done here?'" Johanns said. "What I would offer is that this is 10% that registered as we are literally continuing to develop the system. This is 10% that registered when what we had out there was a thinking paper. … You can see that there is good support here."

## New funding announced

Coinciding with the Secretary's April press conference, APHIS announced it would fund a new economic study focusing on the cost of NAIS implementation within a state. Although the NAIS is still voluntary, a vocal set of stakeholders have questioned the constitutionality of expenses assessed to program participants if it were to become mandatory and requested more complete information about the program's actual cost. This new study may fulfill that cost-analysis request.

The APHIS-funded study will also develop procedures to measure the performance of ID devices. In the final report submitted by the Cattle Working Group (CWG) in July 2004, the group recommended that an independent authority be established to serve as a national testing laboratory to which manufacturers would submit electronic ID (eID) devices for performance evaluation. Although this study does not establish that authority, it does lay the necessary groundwork by developing device-testing procedures.

The third allocation of this funding from APHIS will finance a bi-state study to develop recommendations for livestock exhibitions to achieve compatibility with the NAIS.

Additionally, $3 million was awarded to select states and tribes to evaluate new technologies for animal ID and automated data collection.

---

### Deciphering animal ID

Acronyms are supposed to be simple and easy to use. But, if you've ever heard an animal identification (ID) conversation, you may have found the alphabet soup of acronyms a little hard to follow. As a refresher, here's a list of the most commonly used animal ID acronyms:

- AIN     Animal identification number
- APHIS   Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- ATD     Animal tracking database
- ATPS    Animal Trace Processing System
- CA      Cooperative agreement
- CWG     Cattle Working Group
- eID     Electronic identification
- FAD     Foreign animal disease
- GIN     Group/lot identification number
- ID      Identification
- MOU     Memorandum of understanding
- NAIS    National Animal Identification System
- OIE     World Animal Health Organization
- PIN     Premises identification number
- RFID    Radio frequency identification
- USAIP   United States Animal Identification Plan
- USDA    United States Department of Agriculture
- WTO     World Trade Organization