

USDA - APHIS

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING THE  
NATIONAL ANIMAL ID PROGRAM LISTENING SESSION

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2004

NORTHEAST GEORGIA LIVESTOCK AUCTION BARN  
1200 WINTERVILLE ROAD  
ATHENS, GEORGIA  
9:30 A.M.

USDA PERSONNEL IN ATTENDANCE:

BILL HAWKS, UNDER SECRETARY, MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS

DR. JOHN WIEMERS, NATIONAL DIRECTOR, ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION

NOLAN LEMON

MR. MURPHY: Thank you. My name is Ronnie Murphy. I'm the Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture for Alabama. On behalf of Ron Sparks, our Commissioner, we'd like to express our appreciation to Commissioner Tommy Irvin and Bill Hawks for allowing us to express our opinions. I want to concur about what's already been expressed about Bill Hawks. I've known him longer than his tenure in the Department of Agriculture, and everything that's been said about him I totally agree with, and we're fortunate to have Bill as our Under Secretary during these times.

We want to make four points. Number one, we support--we support the national identification of our animals. It's a necessity. That's number one.

Number two, we think we must have a seamless system. We can't have four or five different systems. We can't have a state system, a federal system, and a private system that are not compatible during times of emergency.

The third point is that we think that the Departments of Agriculture should be in a leadership role. That's no surprise to you after a meeting earlier this week and some others coming up. Bill will be in Alabama week after next. He will hear the same thing from our producers and our organizations over there.

And finally, we think that the system--we've gotta have the money to put in it, and that the coordination of funding is very, very critical. We must consider the economical impacts on all segments of our industry, from the producer, the livestock markets, the buyers, all the way through slaughter.

And finally, of course, we must consider our small producers. The average cow herd in Alabama is 38, and their needs are different than our larger ones. And again, thank

you for being here, Bill, and we will see you a week from Tuesday to go over the same things in much more detail in Alabama. Thank you.

MR. WIGGINS: Thank you. I'm H.R. Wiggins, Turner County Stockyards in Ashburn, Georgia. I don't know much about cattle. I started in 1942 with \$200, and I've been in the cattle business ever since, like some of you have. And I can tell you this. If this thing is implemented forcibly, our auction industry will be lost. The cattle will be in the big producers, those who have vets, they have sufficient force to apply this system. Half or more of our people don't have anybody but them, and they are 60 to 80 year old. They don't have facilities hardly to pin 'em. Sometimes we have to send chutes and corrals.

And I predict--now, I'm not against identification. We eradicated brucellosis in the cattle and cholera in the hogs. Through the state and federal cooperation with the market, we essentially did that. We got rid of it. It forced us to identify our butcher hogs. We had to slap that over our butch hogs. We had five years and we were out of business. All in production and all in slaughter passed into a few hands.

You'll see this happen in the cattle business just like it did in the hogs. Our smaller producers, when we tell them or you tell them or somebody tells them that they've got to go through this when they don't have the facilities, the ability that you're providing they have to have, you tell them that, they're gonna say, "Come and get my cattle."

It's gonna disrupt the markets, mark it down. It'll flood the market temporarily and then we'll be on a shortage of supply of cattle in this country. We'll be importing more of this beef in these boxes that you can't pinpoint. You can't pinpoint where that cow came

from in a box. That's where your cattle are gonna come from. All the cattle that we produce just about are calves that are slaughtered under 30 months of age. Those cattle are not susceptible to BSE, as I understand.

I don't know what you want, but you're running too many rabbits at one time. You're gonna get lost somewhere and you're gonna kill a lot of people in the meantime. I'm sincere in this. And I'm about through, of course. I'm 80. I've got a grandson gonna speak to you in just a minute here that I hope will pick up thereafter if there's anything left. But if we lose, we have 1,025 cattle, and we run from 1,000 to 1,500 over the south half of Georgia and into north Florida, setting special sales, regular sales. Also we have video sales.

Now, our 1,025 cattle to 1,500 cattle, say, we'll run 100 to 150 sellers in those numbers. We averaged 11 cattle to the seller last Wednesday. A lot of our producers have from 12, 15, to 50 cows. Those people are gonna go out of business. All right. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. ADAM WIGGINS: And I'm Adam Wiggins, and that's my granddad. One question I have, is there a federal ID program in effect in Canada or any other country that's foolproof on all species of commercial--commerciable animals. That's my question. Is there one in effect already?

How it would affect us, it would affect the commerce of animals at our barn, and it's the way they're putting it out that it will not. The week before last we had 1,300 cattle. We

got 800 in Wednesday morning from 6:30 a.m. to 7:40 a.m. And if you have a barn, you know it's all you can do to get them unloaded, get 'em tagged, get 'em sorted, get 'em penned before sale time. Ain't no way they could be put through a head catcher and tagged.

And it's like granddaddy said. We're not totally against ID, but it's gonna have to be done before they come to the barn. It doesn't need to be--the burden doesn't need to be put on the barn's back, no matter if you want to try to make it up monetarily or whatever, it's--the time is not there. It will interfere with the commerce of cattle.

Another thing is tracking. An animal leaves the premise, he stops--this was brought up at our L.A. meeting back in May. Not just the cattle that we get in for our own customers and process and load out, but there are animals called hobos around. Most of you got a barn know what a hobo is. It's an animal that comes from another barn and is gonna stay at your barn a few hours, maybe overnight, and be picked up by one of your customers that also bought cattle at your barn and another barn. You're doing a service to your fellow barn owner and your customer. You don't get anything for it, and nobody, I guess, really likes to have hobos at their barn, but it's just the way we do business.

And so that animal may stop two or three times before he gets on the final truck taking him out west or whatever. And it'll be hard to track that animal stopping that many times, you know. If it just comes to the barn and leaves before it goes west, you got two to three stops. But if he goes from sale barn to sale barn before he gets on a big truck and then actually goes, it'll be hard.

It's something to me--and the hoof and mouth is so contagious, I don't see how 48

hours can help you do anything, if it's as contagious as they say it is, and your wildlife can be susceptible to it, your wild deer and hogs. I don't see how 48 hours can control anything on that end. But those are just two or three points I had. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. LEMON: Okay. Marty Hahn followed by Bill Nutt, Bill Rapp, and Jon Hull.

MS. HAHN: Hi. I'm Marty Hahn. I've had horses for about 40 years. I'm only talking about the equine species specific program. I have a lot of questions about it. I'm a member of a number of associations: the Georgia Walking Horse Exhibitors Association, the national association, the Walking Horse Owners Association, draft horse associations, and a bunch of others.

I have a number of friends that have horses anywhere from two horses to 50 horses to 250 head of registered horses. They're already paying a fortune to register them and sell them and everything else, and there's a lot of concern about why you are including horses in this program. I know that they are considered livestock in most states, but less than one percent of the total horse population goes to slaughter. Horses are not eaten in the United States. It is shipped overseas. The three slaughter houses that are in the US are all foreign-owned. That meat all goes overseas.

My question is, why should the other 99.9 percent of the horse owners have to support this program for that small of a niche? We're talking 40 to 50,000 horses a year that are slaughtered.

The other point I'd like to make is, if I as a taxpayer have to somehow help pay this burden, I'm not eating horse meat. I'm buying beef, pork, American-raised poultry, turkey, whatever. You know, why should the taxpayer have to pay to support that program? I see as far as the horse-specific part of this is really only a subsidy to those foreign-owned companies, and a lot of us have a real problem with that.

You know, if it's a question of whether the animals being imported would be carrying diseases, could somehow be infected, I know I have friends that have imported a horse or two. It's taking 12 months for those horses to get into the US. There are very strict quarantines. Now, if quarantines need to be increased between us and Canada, then let those owners who choose to import pay those costs. Please don't impose a program like this on all the rest of us that do not import, which, again, is about 99.9 percent of the horse owners and breeders in the United States.

I guess those are my two biggest concerns. It's just the expense. Who's gonna pay it? The other thing is enforcement. I see a lot of problems with enforcing this. Many people have the pony for their kids in their backyard. There are a lot of people who take their horses trail riding every weekend. They may or may not cross the state line. Are they gonna be registering this every Saturday when they go to ride their horse because they're crossing, they're doing interstate commerce?

I see a lot of problems with enforcing this. And considering the expense, I think rather than putting the money into trying to enforce every trail rider in the United States, perhaps we need to put the money into the true food animal program and not horses. Thank

you.

(Applause.)

MR. NUTT: My name is Bill Nutt. I'm president of the Polk County Cattlemen's Association. I have a cow operation in northwest Georgia. I also serve as Georgia's representative on the NCBA Animal Health & Well-being Committee.

In general, I am very supportive of the concepts that have been laid out here. I was quite familiar with the US Animal ID Program, totally comfortable with the concepts in that. I must say, some of the things I hear here today make me stop and think. You know, the devil is in the details, and I have a couple of thoughts that I want to pass on to you with that in mind.

First off, I support the system, a system that has to be effective in doing the tracing that it's intended to do. It needs to be simple and workable. It ought to accommodate regional differences, because we don't do business in the southeast in the same way that they do in Montana or Colorado or Texas necessarily, but we all need to be able to provide the information into the system there.

We need to have a field-tested system. I'm delighted to see that you're gonna put some implementation money into some trial uses to get things going. And let's have a field-tested system before we make it mandatory as we go along. Having said all that, let's keep this thing producer-focused. Let's make it serve the industry, the beef industry.

Let's not add bureaucratic layers. When I see you use the phrase "verifiable," you make me think of the Coole [phonetic] legislation, and I don't like it. That's not in the best

interest of the industry. It adds to the perception of bureaucracy.

While we're talking, let's don't overlook the value and the cost-effectiveness of private industry participation in this program. At the same time, the state involvement is-- state's involvement is mandatory in order that we get focused responsiveness and that we also have local accountability to the people that are doing the working and implementation.

US Animal ID Program envisioned a concept, as it was briefed multiple times, where the animal ID would begin to apply when an animal entered into commerce. As I listened to your preparation today, I wonder if that has gone by the wayside. That was a good, workable system. We supported that.

We need to track animals. Don't worry about tracking tags. The animal health industry is perfectly capable of tracking the distribution of these numbered tags, just like they track other restricted products that they sell routinely, and you don't need all that. The industry doesn't need all that.

I think I'm about to run out of time in here. I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and we look forward to continued progress and continued dialogue on this subject.

(Applause.)

MR. RAPP: My name is Bill Rapp. I represent Georgia Cattlemen, Harrelson County Cattlemen, and I'm a producer along with my family, and clear down to my grandson. I am a quality producer. I understand some of the comments that have been made here today, and, from a Harrelson County standpoint, most of our cattle do not receive tags. They go straight to the livestock market. In that regard, they do have

problems penning them up, and we need to be cognizant of the fact that those people represent a major segment of our industry.

As a quality producer, I have no problem with the system that's being put in place. But I need to be able to get valuable data for my production and to enhance my herd from what we're doing here. So I hope that we've integrated some of that back into the process so that we can do that.

If we're willing to also pay for the tags in this system, we need to make sure that we have and are assured of confidentiality, from a state level, federal level. I think that confidentiality standpoint is something we need to stress. Some of our producers in Harrelson County have already been very, very upset because they think that Social Security and the premises ID is now gonna tie their sale of cattle back to the government. It probably will happen. But that's something I just need to share with you from a producer standpoint. That's one of the negatives, okay, that comes through this process.

But from the infrastructure standpoint, you presented the point about neutral technology. That's kinda scary a little bit. Bill presented some things about--some words, but that language coming from the Secretary's office seems to open the door for producers in certain areas or involved in particular marketing channels to be at a distinct disadvantage in the market due to the variable cost of the technologies that are in place today and the overall cost of integrating those technologies, okay, into one final system. So I hope you take those things and concerns. Thank you for being here.

(Applause.)

MR. LEMON: Thank you. After Jon Hull, we'll have Grady Bobo, Bobby Lovett, Jim Collins, and Mike Giles.

MR. HULL: Thank you. Mr. Hawks, it's great to see you again. I'm gonna echo a lot of what the Deputy Commissioner--I'm sorry. I'm Jon Hull from the Council of State Governments. I'm gonna echo a lot of what Deputy Commissioner Murphy spoke of.

We commend you all for doing cooperative agreements. We think working from a state level out is the right way to go. States have the expertise, they oftentimes have the experience to do this. When you come down to rolling this out--I'm gonna echo it again--we need to make sure the money is there. These things cannot become a mandatory state program that has no funding attached. It just won't fly very far.

I would also, in addition, point out that if we get into confidentiality issues and data sharing between federal and state, there may need to be special legislation at the state level, because that falls under sunshine laws in some states, and in some states without special legislation you cannot protect that information. So make sure that as we go through this process that gets included. So again, just thank you and commend you for your work in keeping this a state/federal partnership, and thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. BOBO: I'm Graydon Bobo. You spell that G-r-a-y-d-o-n, B-o-b-o. I'm owner/operator of the Wilkes County Stockyard down in Washington, Georgia. My competitor is Mr. Louis there, and Malcolm over in Greensboro. My point that I'd like to make is, I think we need to be sure that the systems we test are proved to be reliable before

they are made mandatory.

The other thing that was mentioned was security of information. I don't want the Under Secretary not to hear me point to that issue again. But I think the only people that need the access to this information is either APHIS or our State Veterinarian's association. I think--not our association, but our State Veterinarian.

The other thing was mentioned about cost sharing on the technology. Nothing was mentioned about cost share or helping markets or dealers that are gonna have to buy all of this technology and install it. And in cases, modify our facilities. Just for the information that we have today, we're looking at--some of our markets are looking at approximately \$50,000 to implement this system, just because it's voluntary. We know if this is gonna follow through we're gonna need some assistance in that manner.

The other thing I'd like to say, being a market operator, is I think the responsibility for applying the tags needs to rest on the producer. Let it be his sole responsibility. And also know that we as markets, as it was mentioned earlier, in order to keep these producers in business, we're gonna have to tag these--provide the tagging services out of our markets. But I appreciate you holding this listening session today. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. LOVETT: My name is Bobby Lovett. I farm in Graves County, southwest Georgia, and have for the biggest part of my life. And what I have to say will be mostly my personal views and opinions, and I ask that you accept them as I intended.

The program that we're--first of all, let me say that an animal ID program of some

form is bound to come. We have a form of it that is now in the process of being put in effect, and the advantages of the animal ID, source verification, whatever you want to call it, is of great benefit to, in my opinion, everybody.

As for the implementation of this, everybody's got an opinion and everybody's got a method, and I choose to leave the implementation to the experts or the people with the expertise to do that, and I refer you back to the brucellosis program and how that was implemented and several other animal health programs that have been handled by the Department of Agriculture. So I think they can handle the implementation.

I think that we should be more concerned with cooperating. And I think that by cooperating with this animal ID and the related things or benefits or spinoffs that would come from animal ID, that it will be of great benefit to all of us.

I think that the producer, the actual producer--and I'll speak for myself. The man that starts out there with the pregnant cow and the baby calf, I think he should have the benefit probably more than any other segment of the industry.

And along with that benefit, he's gonna be in the same shape he's always been in. He's gonna get most of the crap, too, because it's gonna all start right out there on the farm.

And possibly--I don't know if--my opinion on animal ID is that they should all be identified, and I know that's impossible, especially to start with. But I feel like starting with the calves, they had mentioned that it starts--it will start when the animal enters commerce. I really think that's the way to handle the cows, the brute cows, or whatever, the older cows.

But on the other end of this thing, I think the animal ID program should start out

there on the farm, and I think it should start that every calf that's born and grows--I think that's the only--the producer, his cooperation is essential. I'll have to quit right there.

(Applause.)

MR. LEMON: Jim Collins.

MR. COLLINS: First of all, my name is Jim Collins, and I guess I come here today wearing two different hats. One of those, first and foremost, is I serve as the executive vice-president for the Cattlemen's Association, representing 6,000 producers of every size and shape in a different phase of our industry. But I would be remiss if I didn't say the other hat is coming here as a fifth generation cattle producer that's got a vested interest in seeing the cattle industry thrive in this part of the country.

I guess there's basically a few points I'd like to make as we move forward with this process. I really appreciate having the opportunity to have this in Athens and Georgia have an opportunity to play a role in this. But as we move forward this system has got to be simple at the producer level. It's got to have flexibility not only at the producer level but also in working with our state veterinarians, and how we develop this system on a regional basis to address regional differences.

And then we also have got to have that federal commitment, and a two-fold approach there. Federal commitment not only to our state veterinarians and our Georgia Department of Ag to have the funding we need there for them to be able to handle on a rapid pace the premise--the things they need to do to handle premise allocation and follow-up, but we've also got to have the commitment for that infrastructure we have to have

within our marketing structure.

When we talk about regional differences, we need to recognize how we market cattle in this part of the country. And if we don't have the infrastructure we need in place-- and I'm talking about our market operations, our order buyers, even down to testing how private sales would work, we've got to do that first.

As I mentioned earlier, it is vitally important early on, at this stage of the game, that we have adequate funding. From GCA's board perspective, we realize there are limited dollars that are out there, and we want those dollars spent very wisely.

And when we talk about setting up premise allocation and traceability, we want that to be handled to the point at which, if there's a technology that's already out there or a software that's already out there that will achieve what our State Vet's office needs while at the same time we move to a full-blown system interface with things producers may want to do for the database, they need to have that flexibility.

Also, it has been mentioned two or three times before, we need to test any type of system at a grassroots level through pilot projects. I know there have been a lot of conversations on a regional basis here.

We recognize here in the southeast, we do things across state lines and cattle move seamlessly, and we've got to address and to test each of those systems from a large market operation to a small market operation at the order buyer level two-fold, one so we can have all the kinks out of the system, but as importantly, so our producers can see how this system will work, can have input throughout the process before we go further into this process

down the road.

I guess ultimately our goal is to have a simple system that's producer-friendly while achieving that 48-hour traceability that allows for private industry to play a pivotal role in this process. And ultimately, if we can have private industry involved in the holding of that data, I think there's a lot of those issues in terms of confidentiality that we can have greater producer buy-in as we move down the road. I thank you for coming today, and I'm sure we'll be in touch throughout the process.

(Applause.)

MR. GILES: Good morning. My name is Mike Giles, G-i-l-e-s. I'm with the Georgia Poultry Federation. We're a trade association that represents poultry growers and poultry companies and allied industries throughout the state. I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the USDA National Animal ID Program. My comments will be brief.

Since the poultry industry task force on animal ID has yet to complete its work, it's premature for the federation to make extensive comments or take a full position on the animal ID system. A few comments which we think are in line with current thinking of those participating in the task force discussions.

Because of the nature of the vertically integrated poultry system, programs and practices are in place to identify and trace bird flocks. These existing capabilities should be the foundation for an animal ID system in the commercial layer and broiler industries. Along those lines, we think that an animal ID system for poultry should naturally be based

on flocks rather than on individual animals. However, based on recent avian disease experiences, we think it is appropriate to place additional emphasis on the feasibility of an individual animal ID system for poultry in the live bird markets.

We appreciate USDA's effort to involve stakeholders in the development of a National Animal ID Program. We encourage USDA to utilize strong industry representation as this process continues to ensure that a system is implemented that fits the way the vertically integrated poultry industry operates without unnecessary duplication of efforts and with appropriate confidentiality. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. LEMON: Curly Cook, Larry Risse, Nathaniel Jones, and Carter Black.

MR. COOK: Thank you very much. You folks from Washington got to understand one thing. You're here from the government to help us. We understand that.

MR. LEMON: Your name.

MR. COOK: They all know me. Curly Cook from Oglethorpe county. And we've got to understand that that's our mentality. We don't respect the people in Washington, Atlanta, or in Crawford at the county seat. That's where we're coming from. So I'm gonna tell you one thing. I've probably branded as many cows in this room as anybody here back in the '60s, trying to get folks to do production record systems.

And the one thing you've got to remember, you've got to keep it simple, stupid. You've got to remember that. So, we all believe in ID, because--I want your hands up who's carrying a phone. Hold up your hands. See, we all believe in electronics. And if I

asked you how many had a GPS with you, you'd probably include that too. But just one statement, just keep it simple, stupid. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. RISSE: My name is Larry Risse. I'm a former USDA employee, spent 30 years with ARS and was over in England in '88 and '89 and saw some of the damage, so I know we need the system. But like a lot of the people are saying here--I was sitting here Wednesday at the sale barn watching the cows go through the auction, and I would say less than 20 percent of the animals had ear tags. That's gonna be the big problem. How are we gonna get these small farmers to be able to put ear tags in?

We need--as Curly Cook just said, we need to keep it simple so that everybody can benefit. The biggest problem is, how are we going to implement this at the local level? I appreciate the opportunity to speak and wish you success. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. JONES: My name is Nathaniel Jones, and I'm here representing Georgia Cattlemen's Association, Georgia Farm Bureau, and I'm a producer as well, so I've been involved in the process from a producer's standpoint from a couple of years now, and I realize the challenges that are gonna be faced in implementing a system that is accurate and traceable.

But I want to thank USDA's role in this process, and we fully support your efforts and want to be able to work with you in implementing a system that's gonna, first off--and I think this is important for all of us to realize, is that what we're gonna do here with a system

that works is we're gonna reassure the consumer confidence in the beef industry and in other segments of the protein industry here in America. And by doing so, we're gonna produce a product that's gonna be safe and have people that are confident, and it's gonna help support our price structure and our markets across a long period of time. And I think that's important for all of us to realize.

And I think that we need some flexibility, though, in the system, just as some of the other people have said. We need to be able to see what's gonna work and what's not, and to be able to make those changes when those are necessary. We also need a premise ID defined. I think that's gonna be the--obviously the first step, and the most critical one for us to be able to help in the USDA's role in defining that.

I would also like for USDA to look at the example of the Kansas system where it's tied to the owner/operator instead of a GPS system in tracking those animals in a more timely manner. And we just want to be able to say, again, that we do need that money and we need that infrastructure. We do need to have those funds available at every level, and we need to assure the producers that as the money is gonna be spent, it's gonna be money that's gonna be able to use as a distinct marketing tool in the future. Thank you again, USDA, and Mr. Hawks, for your time, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

(Applause.)

MR. BLACK: I'm Carter Black. I'm Associate State Veterinarian, Georgia Department of Agriculture. I appreciate the opportunity, Mr. Hawks, with you being here

today.

I think that we're gonna have to maintain some flexibility in this program. The way that livestock, cattle, are run in Georgia, lots of times we have a lot of cattle that are on rented ground. There are different owners--I mean, different cattle owners may have the ground for different years. I feel like that assigning a premise ID to that is gonna be--to a particular pasture is gonna be a nightmare to keep it updated on an annual basis.

We do need some--to try to get money into this program to support the infrastructure that's needed in our livestock markets and our livestock broker's barns that these owner buyers are operating because they buy cattle from--off the farm and then out of barns too, and they assemble those cattle and then ship them, so they're gonna need the same infrastructure as livestock markets. I appreciate the opportunity of being here.

(Applause.)

MR. LEMON: The final three registered speakers are Lee Myers, Trisha Marsh Johnson, and Amy Rosen.

MS. MYERS: Thank you. I'm Lee Myers, State Veterinarian and Assistant Commissioner for Animal Industry with the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Mr. Secretary, I appreciate the opportunity for you to come to Georgia and listen to us regarding the animal ID plan and particularly these producers here today.

One point I want to make is if a foreign animal disease were introduced into Georgia the public indeed will demand from my office that we trace back all those animals, not only the animals but animal product that would be related to that disease.

An example was in December 23rd, when Washington State diagnosed Mad Cow. Halfway around the world, on the other coast, beginning that afternoon the TV stations were at our office interviewing the Commissioner, interviewing me, wanting to know if beef in Georgia was safe. Luckily we were able to report that we had tested more cattle in Georgia than any other state in the southeast, and we knew we did not have Mad Cow in Georgia. So we were able to relay that confidence to the producers.

And with the Secretary's announcement in December that we will have an animal ID program, we appreciate the opportunity to help craft that program and be a part. And to use your term, Mr. Secretary, working together works, and we appreciate you working with us.

The Georgia Department of Agriculture has also been listening. We've been going to a lot of national meetings, state meetings, local meetings. We've interacted with many of you that are here today. And we hear these same common themes. The cost, who's gonna pay for it, and also the confidentiality.

One mention on the confidentiality. There are those that don't always support agriculture. There are those that don't always--are supportive, don't understand where their food comes from, that wish us harm. It is critical that we protect the producers, the market channels, from being openly scrutinized in the event they do participate in this program.

One thing I want to mention that has been a personal concern of mine that I haven't mentioned here today is, we need to maintain the original purpose of this program. This program is intended to trace back animal disease within 48 hours. It is not intended to be

connected with country of origin labeling. It is not intended to trace back a food borne illness back to the farm, and we need to make sure that the original purpose of this program is maintained, that it is animal disease.

Flexibility you've heard about. I understand phase 2 is going to implement a system, regional approach, and we do need that. We're a cow/calf state. We're very common in the southeast, but we're very, very different from those in the west that have branding laws, common grazing lands, and again, we need that flexibility.

This is gonna be a yeoman's task. I appreciate the Southeastern Livestock Network coming forward. I think they do have the right idea. They want to develop a southeastern regional plan. They want to secure the funding, and they want to have producers in control. I think this is one of the first times where we in the state government or federal government are not coming forward saying, "This is the way we're gonna do it."

So I appreciate you getting ideas from the industry. We do think producers need to be in control. We do think the market needs to drive the process. And this does not need to slow down the market. If we're gonna have the animal ID, it needs to move at the same speed of the market.

As the first vice president of the US Animal Health Association, I look forward to working with you on the proposing of the UMNIR and however we can help, we'd be glad to do so. Thank you again.

(Applause.)

MS. MARSH JOHNSON: Good morning. My name is Trisha Marsh Johnson

and I am a poultry veterinarian who lives herein Athens, Georgia, and I am testifying today on behalf of the National Turkey Federation.

The National Turkey Federation is the only national trade association that exclusively represents the turkey industry, and we represent almost 100 percent of the turkey produced in the US. We want to make sure that we make a distinction that we do support the effort that USDA is making in a National Animal ID Program, but because the poultry industry task force has not forwarded specifics at this time, we can't endorse specifics about a program, and of course we would never be presumptuous enough to speak on the specifics for another species.

We do think that because turkeys and other commercial poultry are marketed on a flock basis, that identification needs to be done by flock and commercial poultry rather than on an individual basis, because the live bird markets are an entirely--a bird of a different feather, if you will, and they have been very, very involved in most of the poultry animal disease outbreaks in this country.

We do think that you need possibly to look at individual bird identification for the live bird markets, particularly looking at places like Hong Kong, where they've instituted those individual animal ID systems to help control avian influenza, to see if there are any lessons that can be learned.

We also think that since the intent is to try to be able to trace flocks back within 48 hours of needing that information, we have that capability already in the commercial poultry industry, so we would like USDA to use those existing business systems as opposed

to layering on an additional system.

There are a lot of state programs. Georgia has a very, very good state program that is activated in the incidence of an animal disease for poultry. We've used that on several cases for vaccine-induced inclusion bodied laryngotracheitis. We've used those systems that are already in place and that are working.

We also believe that the program needs to be voluntary, confidential, and strictly focused on animal disease. USDA legal counsel has told us that if it maintains voluntary, then we will be able to maintain confidentiality. We're concerned that if it was a mandatory program, that FOIA request would be able to release information to the public.

Last month, the Connecticut State Veterinarian reported that the avian influenza outbreak in Connecticut in 2003 is believed to have been by an animal terrorist organization infiltrating that commercial poultry operation, and a criminal investigation is ongoing. So you don't want to give that type of information either to foreign bioterrorists or local or domestic militant animal rights organizations.

Again, we believe that it does need to be focused specifically on disease control. We need to be able to give that confidence to our trading partners. The embargos due to avian influenza, we've been losing \$20 million a week in the commercial poultry industry.

Last but not least, a need for legislation. There are currently eight major bills in Congress involving animal ID. Most of those were submitted after the BSE outbreak in Washington State. We really believe that this should be a voluntary program and there isn't need for Congressional action at this time. The only caveat would be that if Congress

needed to step in in order to protect this information from FOIA requests, we'd ask that they do that.

And again, just expect it to be voluntary, focused on animal disease, and, of course, confidentiality. And I have written comments to submit. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. ROSEN: I'm Amy Rosen. I'm a producer from Oconee County. How many of you were a product or your children or grandchildren went to public schools? Well, without ID and immunization, you didn't go to school. And I think a national ID program would raise the level of animal health and the quality of our commodities.

I do have a few questions, though. Have the packers been solicited to help subsidize the cost and implementation of the program? And number two, at what stage in the animal's life would the ID need to be installed? And the third one, could the sale barns and terminals for feed lot transport install ID's for small producers? We've heard a lot of people talk about they have to run their cattle in the catch pen and then on a trailer. They don't have facilities to do this. So could it be done as they hit the sale barn, ready to go to the sale, or if they're being loaded up on tractor-trailers to go out west to feed lots.

I think a lot of the seed stock producers already are--would be willing to do this as they sell their cattle. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. LEMON: Okay. That concludes the comment period. I want to thank you for coming out. I think Mr. Hawks has a couple of points he wants to respond to. And

again, I want to urge you, my e-mail address is on the screen there. If you have any comments that you'd like to e-mail, or if you have any written comments that you want to give me now, they'll all be made a part of the official record.

MR. HAWKS: Thank you. One of the things that I was expecting when I came to Georgia, Commissioner, was that people would not be bashful, and I have found that to be the case, and I sincerely appreciate that.

What I will attempt to do--and I was taking notes as each one of you made your comments, and so I'm going to go through and try to pick out some of the highlights and try to address those, and then we'll have John do the same thing. We were both taking notes, so maybe I missed some of them and John got them. And I'll also be available, I understand there are some of you that wanted to ask questions but didn't want to do the presentation here, so I'll be available after we leave here for that as well.

You know, I keep hearing the diversity in the industry, you know, how things are in the southeast. That is something that we absolutely recognize. You know, one size does not fit all. One size will not fit all. So it's very clear to us that we're going to have to rely heavily on the states, on the state veterinarians, to work through these systems to make sure that we're addressing those concerns. So that's one of the big things that I want to make sure that we do.

The concerns about the small producers, that's the same thing. As I said, one size doesn't fit all. One of the last questions was, where would this need to be done? It has always been our thought that as long as the animal is on that original premise, it really--you

know, it really doesn't matter.

When it leaves that premise is when it needs to be identified, when it goes into commerce, because that's where--this is a disease. This is animal health that we're talking about. That point was made, that this needed to be maintained as an animal health issue. That is exactly what it is.

We need to be extremely flexible. We intend to be flexible. Part of our thoughts are to allow that producer to be able to get the information that--okay. Stephen's telling me that I need to get closer to this thing. To allow the flexibility to have--to let the producers get the information with this same system. We only need just little bits and pieces, little small pieces of information.

For your purposes or some other marketing purposes, you may need a lot of different information. But I want to make it clear that this is animal health for us. That's really what it's all about.

And I will reiterate again the confidentiality of this data. Dr. Myers made the point, there are some people that are not as interested in agriculture as we are. It was alluded to the possible terrorists in Connecticut with the poultry flock there. So we have no intention of moving forward with anything until we can protect that data. I mean, I think it's very clear that's a commitment that we are making, that I am making personally. This administration has made that commitment, and we are working as we speak to determine the best way for that to happen. As a matter of fact, I hope to be able, when we have the next one of these listening sessions, to maybe even be a little bit more specific as to what

those are. But right now, we're exploring all avenues.

And I'm trying to--and sunshine laws. We're back to confidentiality again. We recognize the need where the states are involved as well, so we're looking at that, to make sure that anything we do.

Concerns about our discussions on technology neutral. I think it is very important for it to be technology neutral. I mean, we may not want to use the same thing in Georgia that you want to use in Colorado, you know, so I think that is very important.

And I heard one comment about to let the experts figure this out. Now, I don't know, John may be the expert, but we can't as experts.

And the comment was made that we came from Washington to help you. You know, I don't know that that's necessarily the case. We came from Washington to get you to help us, to get you to help us come up with a program that will work for Georgia, that will work for Alabama, that will work for Mississippi, and something that will work out in the west as well, but it may not be exactly the same thing. So we are building a lot of flexibility. We think that it is very important to have that flexibility.

The issue on the poultry side about how we handle poultry versus cattle, that's a very good point, the comment about flocks versus individual identification. But with respect to the live bird markets, there's a desire to do individual identification there. As a matter of fact, we're doing a Low Path Avian Influenza program. We just transferred almost \$13 million from CCC to start that. That's actually a part of that program, to work with the live bird markets to do individual identification there. So we're working on a lot of

different fronts toward this.

I'm trying to see--to go through my notes here. Oh. The issue with respect to the equine, to the horses. I think there we feel like it's very important to be able, as we move somewhere down the road, to address horses just as well, because there are a lot of diseases, a lot of issues there. But we are not where we need to be, and with respect to such a small percentage of those horses going to slaughter, there's really no connection in my mind between whether a horse goes to slaughter and a horse that has some kind of disease that it can spread.

So I think that's--that's from our perspective. We see this--I'm coming back once more to, this is an animal disease control and management issue.

I'm taking my time going through these to see if I--the KISS system, I like that. We intend to keep it as simple as we possibly can. John, do you want to wrap up? Did I miss anything?

DR. WIEMERS:        You're doing great. I would like to say a couple of things.

MR. HAWKS:        Okay. He said he picked up a couple of things that I didn't. But once again, before I leave this podium, thank y'all for coming to this sale barn. Thank you for being here. It is very important for us to hear what you've got to say. The local people, you're the ones that are going to be involved with this, you know. We will all be gone to somewhere else, but, you know, you and your descendants will be here continuing to deal with whatever we put together, and I think it's important that you, the people out here on the ground, are the ones that help us design a program that will work for a long

time to come. So thank you all.

(Applause.)

DR. WIEMERS: I never like to give the final word, because that's a dangerous position to be in. In reading the transcript of the last listening session, Mr. Hawks mentioned that he likes to stay at the 100,000 foot level, but I'll tell you, he's one sharp guy. He's coming down to these technical aspects. I think by the time these listening sessions are over, he'll have the technical knowledge also. It's amazing.

I did want to comment on a couple of things. When we talked about where a comment was made about the technology neutral situation creating--possibly creating market disadvantages for some markets that choose to implement it versus some that don't choose to implement it, you know, it's tough to stand in and say, "No, you can't be an early adopter of technology," or, on the other hand, "Yes, you have to do it."

There are some markets across the country that are choosing today to adopt new technology just as a business decision. And I think that's one of the things that may prove to--to show how this new technology that they're using may be at an advantage to them. I don't know--I don't think that the government wants to get involved in that by saying no, a market can't do that. We don't either want to get in a situation of saying that every market has to adopt that either.

So whatever--it's kind of like in the grocery business, there were some early adopters of credit cards, right? And then you saw credit cards, you finally saw a standardized reader come into place. Now you didn't have to have different readers for

different credit cards. Now the credit card industry has evolved to the point where you can transfer your balance easily from one credit card to the other.

This is something that I think will evolve. I think it's just gonna be part of the business of moving livestock. So I think there will be some early adopters, and maybe it will be a market advantage for them. But that's our way of life here in this country.

Again, the issues of confidentiality, I don't think I need to mention anything more about that. There was some discussion about the premises identification being tied to an owner rather than a location in some instances. That may be true.

We had long discussions in our development team standards committee on how to do this and what to tie it to, and we got to the point where we were trying to trace--we had some real live situations where we were trying to see what it would take to trace some hogs back to the premises of origin. This was a real live situation where they were doing some studies on the pseudorabies eradication program, trying to do some surveillance and find out where the animals came from so they could see what areas were under surveillance and what areas weren't under surveillance to assess the completeness of their surveillance program.

Well, lo and behold, when they took the premises ID's off those animals and mapped them and put them in their database and mapped them on a map, they found out that there was a large concentration of market hogs in downtown Minneapolis. Because they were all owner based, and a lot of the banks owned those animals, and so the checks were sent to the banks. And so we really need to know in our premises identification

system where the animals are, and not necessarily where the owners live.

That owner information, maybe the owner has the best information on where the animals are and can do that, but maybe it's the herdsman that's got the most information. We need contact information for each premises. Not necessarily owner information, but some records of where the animals have been. Some of those technical things will be worked out in the cooperative agreements, and I appreciate what Dr. Black said as far as these pastures that have animals on them from year to year and the stock fields and wheat fields and those sorts of things that might have that sort of thing.

Keep in mind that that's probably not where the animals are gonna originate at, because they're probably just premises that an animal might be associated with for a period of time. But those things, we need to define ways of handling those. And again, there will be regional differences between how we do that.

A question about where animals need to be identified. Certainly they need to be identified when they enter commerce. If you have animals that are born on your property and they live their whole life there and they die and you bury them there, they never enter commerce, there's really no need to identify them because they've always been there, they've never come in contact with any other animals, and so that's the case. But once they leave your property and they enter commerce and become commingled or associated with other animals, then it becomes an epidemiological necessity to identify them.

I'd like to echo the sentiments we have of the idea of producers getting together on a regional basis and looking at how to solve regional problems. It's good to see this thing

happening. We're seeing it in different parts of the country, too. The northwest states, the midwest states. They're coming together to say, okay, "How can we make these things work?" I think it's just wonderful to see industry stepping up to the plate.

Again, this is a livestock program. It's not just a cattle program. When we have our entire National Animal Identification System program standards in place, it's gonna be a work to behold. It'll be something that we can hold up to the rest of the world and say, "This is how we track animals in the United States." Not just how we track cattle. Not just how we track swine. But this is how we track our animals.

And we can show it to them. We've got it in black and white. This is the poultry plan. This is the sheep plan. This is the equine plan. This is the cattle plan. Then we can turn to them and say, "Now, let's see yours. What's your plan?" And I think most of the countries would say, "Well, here's our cattle plan," but they won't have much else.

The question was asked about what does Canada have. They have a good cattle identification system. It's not a tracking system; it's an identification system. Identifies them at birth, and it retires the number at slaughter. They're just on their infancy of getting in with the sheep identification and pork identification.

I think there are a lot of things that we're doing in this country that's leading the world in animal identification, livestock identification. We shouldn't be thinking that we're behind the gun on a lot of things, because we're really leading the world in a lot of things, and I think we should be proud of that. Again, we need to take it slow. We need to work into this. I appreciate those thoughts, that we need to take it slow and see what works and

go with what works.

And again, when I look at the people that were on that development team, they weren't pencil-necked geeks from Washington. Well, I'm not pencil-necked, but some people call me a geek. But a lot of them were producers, market operators, association directors. Some folks from the packing industry. Just lots of people from all sectors of the industry, and it just--I think this is one program that we've got in this country, in the USDA, that we can say we've had more input on this than probably any other program that we've ever put together. And we're still getting input.

I appreciate your comments today. Again, I feel very comfortable being in a livestock market. It's been a while. And as the National Director for Animal Identification, I thank you very much. It means a lot to me personally and to our staff. Thank you.