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USDA RELEASES REPORT ON NATIONAL ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM PILOT PROJECTS

WASHINGTON, May 4, 2007--The U.S. Department of Agriculture today published a final report on a variety of pilot projects conducted throughout 2004 to test technologies and procedures recommended for use with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

Many of the projects tested the system in real-world scenarios, integrating animal identification and movement reporting into everyday commerce. The results provide valuable information about the day-to-day use of animal identification and tracing technology.

“The pilot projects demonstrate that NAIS will work well and greatly benefit America’s producers. These concrete examples of the system’s capabilities, tried and proven in the field, are a critical step forward in our efforts to implement this important program,” said Bruce Knight, undersecretary of USDA’s marketing and regulatory programs mission area.

Key lessons learned from the projects include:

- *The retention rate of radio frequency identification (RFID) tags is much higher than anticipated.* Project participants (one with 6,000 tagged animals) reported a retention rate of nearly 100 percent with the button-like RFID eartags.
- *Existing animal health and marketing programs can be an effective, producer-friendly means of collecting data for NAIS.* The projects show specific examples (such as Pennsylvania’s Dairy Herd Improvement program) of programs already in place that integrate well with NAIS--allowing producers to participate in the system with minimal time, effort or added expense on their part.
- *Workable options are available for producers who want to identify their animals electronically without investing in reader equipment.* Producers were able to eliminate the need for expensive equipment by using group/lot visual tags for day-to-day management purposes and then matching the tags with individual RFID tag numbers when animals moved off the premises.
- *The use of electronic identification allows for more accurate and efficient recordkeeping.* Project participants reported that using RFID technology significantly reduced data entry errors, enhanced business practices and decreased labor costs.
- *The use of RFID at auction markets can improve animal welfare and human safety.* Using RFID technology reduced the need to restrain animals when recording their identification numbers.
- *Identification used for NAIS can support other programs, including value-added opportunities.* In several projects, individually-identified animals yielded monetary premiums at auction sales.

USDA provided approximately \$6.6 million in Commodity Credit Corporation funds for the projects in 2004. These initial 16 projects represent the first stage of the NAIS pilot project program. The program supports the states and tribes in carrying out research and field trials that resolve questions and concerns about NAIS processes, technologies and costs.

Several additional field trial projects, funded with fiscal year 2005 monies, are now underway to provide more statistical comparisons of technologies and more clearly define implementation costs for NAIS.

More information on the findings from the 2004 pilot projects, as well as a description of current efforts, is available in the *Pilot Project Report*. The report can be accessed on USDA's NAIS Web site at www.usda.gov/nais by clicking on the "NAIS Library" function in the top toolbar. Scroll down to "NAIS Plans and Reports" and click on the link.

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