

Microchip Tracking is Purely Voluntary

By Cindy Hale

12-7-2006

Despite hoopla and hysteria brewing on the Internet, claims that the United States government would implement a mandatory identification system for livestock, including horses, appear to be untrue. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is emphasizing that the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) will be a voluntary program and that no plans are in place to make the program mandatory.

The NAIS is a system intended to control the spread of disease and to minimize the negative impact of a disease outbreak on the livestock industry. This would be done through the identification of premises that hold or manage livestock, animal identification and the recording of animal movements. Some states are mandating parts of the system within their state, for example mandatory premises registration in Wisconsin, but the NAIS as a national comprehensive program is not mandatory.

"I've been taking a hard look at the program, basically took it all the way down to the frame and rebuilding, trying to make it simpler, make it more evident of what it's all about, trying to dispel some of the misinformation and rumor and innuendo that's been associated with it," says Bruce Knight, the new under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs at USDA in an article that appeared on Oct. 20, 2006 on the Brownfield Ag Network.

"I think the most important thing for everybody to recognize is this is a voluntary program," Knight continues. "So that means that we've got to have a program that a rancher can look at and say, 'this is worth the extra cost on my operation.'"

So if horse owners decide to use microchips for identification purposes, that's up to them. There is no conspiracy against the private ownership of equines or other ranch animals. For further information on the NAIS, you can visit www.usda.gov/nais.