



**USDA Listening Session Written Testimony  
on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)  
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*Introduction*

The US needs to move as rapidly as possible on the implementation of a premises and animal identification system for our country that works. The initial system will not be the ultimate system, but the US needs to move forward with a system that will work, recognizing that the system will continue to be enhanced as further needs are defined and new technology is developed. Protecting the health of the nation's livestock industry should be the foremost objective of all segments and partners of the livestock industry.

The National Dairy Herd Improvement Association (National DHIA) strongly supports the development and rapid implementation of a national premises and animal ID system. The system is critical to the future of animal agriculture as emerging animal health issues are addressed. Having a system in place that will allow a complete traceback within 48 hours of finding a foreign animal disease helps protect our nation's animals and our producer's livelihood. Without a national premises and animal ID system the US livestock population is at significant risk to animal health outbreaks.

### *Opportunities*

The US needs a premises and animal identification system that works. This system must work with a minimum of disruption to existing operations and commerce. As the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is implemented, it is strongly encouraged to make full use of a voluntary, producer led system that has been in place for nearly 100 years that already collects much of the information needed by the system.

The Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI) system has always relied on individual animal identification as well as herd or premise ID to collect monthly information. The DHI system currently maintains records on approximately 4.5 million lactating dairy cows or about half of the US milking dairy herd. Young stock are routinely entered into and maintained in the system, thus about 9 million more young stock are documented. The DHI program operates in every state and has field staff that routinely visits producer members to collect and verify information. This information includes herd or premise information as well as individual animal information including ID, date of birth and movement in and out of the herd. This demonstrates that the current DHI system with slight modifications is available to cooperate and move the NAIS forward.

In addition, the National Dairy Herd Improvement Association (National DHIA) system has served as an ID tag distributor to dairy producers for many years. The National DHIA and the Field Service Affiliates are experienced in the identification area and ready to serve the NAIS system as an AIN manager and distributors. National DHIA encourages final standards to be determined so that our work can be adapted and be “official” in accordance to the NAIS system.

### *Challenges – Confidentiality and Governance*

There have been producer concerns over confidentiality of producer information. This is a valid concern. However, it has been the National DHIA and its producer members experience, that we have been able to effectively share information with authorized users including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) without putting producers and their information at risk. National DHIA is confident that this can be done through the NAIS as well.

One critical element that will enhance producer trust and confidence is providing a means for producer input in the governance of the program. To work effectively the system needs to be a true cooperative effort between state and federal animal health officials as well as industry. National DHIA urges you to assure that there is full representation of actual producers in the governance and evaluation of the NAIS as it is implemented and enhanced.

### *Summary*

The Dairy Herd Improvement system provides an opportunity for the national ID system to partner with a voluntary producer led program that is trusted by producers and industry. The DHI system has a long history of excellence in data collection and transfer that is voluntary and operates with producer governance. A partnership between NAIS and National DHIA would minimize duplication of reporting by dairy producers and provide the NAIS with immediate access to a system that can collect the small amount of added information that is required for the NAIS.

The DHI organization has the experience needed to be an AIN manager and AIN distributors. The system now focuses on dairy, but it can easily be made available to other species. DHI organizations would welcome the opportunity to work with producers of any livestock species in this effort. National DHIA also stands ready to be an active industry partner in the future governance of the program.

We look forward to having the opportunity for the DHI system as a partner in this important effort to safeguard the health of the national herd.

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