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Senate slices funds for animal identification program Ranchers call for end of all funding

Billings, Mont. – Although pleased with Senate action Monday cutting funding of a controversial animal identification program in half, a group representing livestock producers wants Congress to end all funding for the program.

The Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee accepted an amendment cosponsored by Senators Jon Tester, D-Mont., and Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., to reduce the budget for the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) from \$14.67 million to \$7.3 million. The amendment also limits use of the funds only to pay for rule-making activities.

NAIS would identify and track all livestock and poultry animals owned by producers and others across the country.

“Thank you, Senators Tester and Enzi, for taking the lead against this expensive, intrusive, and unworkable program,” said Dan Teigen, a rancher with the Western Organization of Resource Councils. “The conference committee should zero out all funding for the animal identification program. You don’t just want to slow down a runaway train. You want to stop it.”

Teigen noted that producers voiced strong opposition to mandatory NAIS during 14 listening sessions held by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). “Most of the speakers were highly critical of the program,” he said. “NAIS, as proposed, would shift of cost and liability onto independent producers, while jeopardizing private livestock information, causing more harm than good.”

The Senate is expected to act on its agriculture appropriations bill today. The version of the bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives contains no funding for NAIS. A conference committee is expected to meet after the August recess to reconcile differences between the two bills.

“We look forward to working with Senators Tester and Enzi to stop funding this flawed program,” Teigen said. “NAIS is contrary to the best interest of ranchers in the West, hog farmers in the Midwest, poultry growers in the southeast, and 4-H kids around the country. USDA could start helping by not trying to steer this train from the caboose.”

Based in Billings, Mont., WORC is a network of conservation and family agriculture organizations in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

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