

WORC

Western Organization of Resource Councils

For Immediate Release: April 9, 2009

For more information, contact: Jeri Lynn Bakken, WORC staff, 701-376-7077, or Mabel Dobbs, 208-880-0441.

Questions Plague Animal Identification Program

Ranchers ask for clarity about program goals and operation from Agriculture Secretary

Billings, Mont. – A group of livestock producers is seeking answers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) about the controversial animal identification program.

In a letter sent to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on April 8, the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) has asked the department to respond to questions regarding the National Animal Identification System's (NAIS) effect on existing animal health and identification programs, data collection and use, cost to livestock producers and taxpayers, type of identification tags, and whether NAIS is truly voluntary.

“Even though APHIS (Animal, Plant and Health Inspection Service) and USDA have issued a number of business plans, many questions remain for the producers we represent,” wrote rancher Mabel Dobbs, Chair of WORC’s Livestock Committee. “We have a number of questions we would like you to answer to help our members better understand the application of what appears to be a very cumbersome program.”

For more than five years, USDA has been developing the program to identify cattle, horses, sheep, hogs and other livestock for the stated purpose of “tracking animal disease”. At various times, the program has been described by politicians and county extension agents as a marketing program, disease control/elimination program, a food safety program, and a homeland security program.

The department has spent over \$130 million on NAIS so far, and another \$14 million has been appropriated for program this year.

Producers have been reluctant to register for NAIS, Dobbs said. To date, only about 35 percent of ranchers have signed up for the program.

“We keep hearing about how great this program is going to be, but no one can or wants to answer the hard questions that really affect my bottom line,” Dobbs said. “The answers to these

questions are critical to the stability of every farm family in the country, but USDA still hasn't given us clear information. We hope Secretary Vilsack answers these questions for producers.”

A copy of the letter is available at www.worc.org.

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.

###