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**USDA and Corporate Agribusiness Continue to Push Animal ID Scheme
Consumers and Independent Producers Lose if Big Ag Wins on Animal Tracking**

WASHINGTON, DC (August 9, 2011): The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today released a new proposed rule for mandatory animal traceability. While USDA already has traceability requirements as part of existing animal disease control programs, the proposed rule goes much further to require animal tagging and tracing without specific disease threats. The rule has raised significant concerns among family farm and ranch advocates, who accuse the agency of failing to provide a coherent, factual explanation of the program's necessity.

"USDA brags about the success of past programs, but has abandoned the principles that made them successful," argued Bill Bullard, CEO of R-CALF USA. "Past programs were based on sound science and were developed in response to the transmission, treatment, and elimination of specific identified diseases. USDA's new approach is a one-size-fits-all approach that does not specifically aim at the control of livestock diseases."

The proposed rule greatly expands what animals must be identified, including feeder cattle, which are processed at a young age and never enter the breeding herd.

"The large volume of the animals that USDA proposes to track could overwhelm the capabilities of state agencies, making it impossible to retrieve useful data if there is in fact a disease outbreak," stated Gilles Stockton, a Montana rancher and member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils. Stockton also serves on the USDA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health.

The proposed rule creates new requirements for not only animal owners, but also for businesses associated with livestock. For example, veterinarians and auction barns would be required to keep records on every tagged animal for a minimum of five years.

"On the one hand, the agency points to diseases with long incubation periods, such as tuberculosis, to justify these extensive new recordkeeping requirements," notes Judith McGeary, Executive Director of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance and vice-chair of the USDA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health. "But, at the same time, the agency plans to require the same paperwork on feeder cattle, which are butchered between one and two years of age. So the majority of the records that the vets and auction barns will store will be on animals

that died years before. All this does is impose unnecessary burdens on small businesses, accelerating the loss of independent businesses to corporate industrial-scale agribusiness.”

“Consumers need the USDA to start focusing on the animal health and food safety risks posed by industrialized meat production,” said Patty Lovera, Assistant Director of Food & Water Watch. “If USDA devoted as much energy to preventing animal diseases as it has to promoting animal tracking, our food system would be in much better shape.”

The USDA has presented its traceability scheme as an animal health program, but it has emphasized the importance of the export market to the United States in promoting its new plan. The powerful meatpacking lobby has continued to push for such mandated traceability requirements in order to develop international standards for exports. Critics have suggested this is not in the American public’s best interest, however, since the U.S. is a net importer of beef and cattle and the profits from the export market go to a small handful of massive meatpacking companies.

“If Americans don’t want their food supply to cave like the banking and housing industries, they need to urge the USDA to re-write the rule to address the needs of family farmers rather than the meatpacking lobby,” stated Mark A. Kastel, senior farm policy analyst at The Cornucopia Institute.

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