

## National Animal Identification System (NAIS) Equine Fact Sheet

*Celeste Crisman, Equine Extension Specialist, Virginia Tech*  
*R. Scott Pleasant, Associate Professor and Chief of Large Animal Surgery, Virginia Tech*

### History

Animal identification in all species is not a new concept. For centuries, animal owners have used varying methods such as hot branding to establish identity. More recently methods such as freeze branding, tattoos, and microchips have been used.

In 2002, concerted discussions were begun by animal industry leaders to establish a national system for the rapid identification and trace back of animals in the event of a major disease outbreak. In 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiated the implementation of a National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

### Goals and Vision

The NAIS will permit the rapid tracing of animals during a disease outbreak, helping to limit the expense and scope of the outbreak, thus minimizing the impact on domestic and foreign markets. The ultimate goal is to provide health officials with the ability to identify within 48 hours all animals and premises that have had direct contact with a disease of concern. Working groups are developing plans for each species, including alpacas and llamas, bison, cattle, deer and elk, horses, goats, poultry, sheep, and swine.

The NAIS will be established over time through three basic implementation phases:

- Premises Registration – the identification and registration of locations that manage or hold animals. Each premises will have a unique Premises Identification Number.
- Animal Identification – each animal will have its own unique Animal Identification Number (AIN) or a group/lot identification number for those animals that move through the production chain as a group.

- Animal Tracking – the reporting of basic information as animals move from one premises to another. This step is a key component in the rapid identification of exposed animals and is possibly the most challenging component of the NAIS.

### Implementation Plans

In order to successfully achieve the 48-hour trace-back goal, cooperation among federal, state, and industry personnel as well as the participation of animal owners is critical. Currently, each state, under the guidance of the NAIS and USDA, is responsible for implementing the program. With Premises ID being the initial focus, approximately 322,000 premises have already been registered throughout 50 states and two territories. At this time Premises ID is voluntary in Virginia. The goal is 100 percent premises registration by January 2009.

Methods for Animal Identification Systems and Animal Tracking are currently being discussed and evaluated by the individual animal species working groups. Plans to implement species-specific identification methods began in 2006.

### Confidentiality

The NAIS is being developed to contain only information required by animal health officials to track and identify animals suspected of carrying disease and to identify any other animals that may have been exposed to a disease. Proprietary production data will remain in private databases and will not be included in the NAIS system. The USDA is pursuing various options for appropriately protecting the information in the NAIS from public disclosure.

[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)



Produced by Communications and Marketing, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences,  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Mark A. McCann, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; Alma C. Hobbs, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State, Petersburg.

VT/028/1206/15M/271272/465212



VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

## The NAIS and Horses

In 2003, the American Horse Council organized a task force to begin reviewing equine specific plans. This group has evolved into the Equine Species Working Group (ESWG), which the USDA has designated as the official equine group to develop recommendations regarding the equine industry and the NAIS. The ESWG is composed of 35 representatives from across the horse industry and is working to ensure that specific concerns of the horse industry are addressed.

The ESWG has identified some specific benefits as the NAIS relates to equines:

- Reduce the potential effect and enhance the control of equine disease outbreaks.
- Maintain equine commerce and the movement of horses in the case of a disease outbreak.
- Assist equestrian events in ensuring a healthy environment for participating horses.
- Expedite recovery and identification of horses in the event of loss due to natural disaster, theft, or accident.
- Facilitate import and export of equines.
- Uphold the horse industry as a responsible member of the livestock community.

The ESWG provides important feedback recommendations to the USDA. This ensures that if and when equine ID becomes mandatory, the NAIS guidelines will reflect the unique needs and characteristics of the equine industry.

At this time, horse owners in Virginia are encouraged to voluntarily register their equine premises. Premises registration may be completed online at the VDACS website ([www.vdacs.virginia.gov/](http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/)).

More NAIS information is at:

- United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service NAIS website ([www.usda.gov/nais](http://www.usda.gov/nais))
- Equine Species Working Group website found at ([www.horsecouncil.org/](http://www.horsecouncil.org/))
- Virginia Animal ID website (<http://www.vanimalid.info>)