1. The Draft Strategic Plan calls for making the entire system mandatory by January 2009. Is a mandatory identification program necessary to achieve a successful animal disease surveillance, monitoring, and response system to support Federal animal health programs? Please explain why or why not.

   A mandatory program is not necessary, feasible or realistic. Enactment of a mandatory identification program is a huge step from actual compliance within the industry. There is no single, standard, method of identification that works nationwide. Ranches, farms and feeding operations vary so greatly from state to state and region to region that a "blanket approach" to implementing an identification system is neither manageable nor useful to the industry. An attempt to require involvement in a standardized system would be met with great resistance and would cause more problems than it solves. The industry would be divided into segments of people that comply, those that don't because they can't afford to, those that don't because they are dishonest and those that don't because they are unaware.

   Existing programs such as brand inspection have been proven to work. Experience is the only true applicable method of testing effectiveness, and many of these systems have decades or even centuries of "testing" to perfect any problems that arise.

   In addition, there are already trained personnel capable of carrying out traceback needs via the brand inspection program. In areas with good working brand inspection programs (like most of the Western U.S.) there is no need to "reinvent the wheel." Brand inspection works to identify and trace cattle. Don't add another expense to cattle producers' already stretched-thin budgets.

2. In the current Draft Strategic Plan, the NAIS would require that producers be responsible for having their animals identified before the animals move to a premises where they are to be commingled with other animals, such as a sale barn. At what point and how should compliance be ensured? For example, should market managers, fair managers, etc., be responsible for ensuring compliance with this requirement before animals are unloaded at their facility or event? Please give the reasons for your response.

   Sellers should be prepared to either show identification or offer verification via a signed affidavit. It may be necessary for livestock market managers to offer a venue (physical location) for this verification process. It may be necessary, also, for the livestock barn to provide some administrative services to aid the process of communicating with sellers and buyers, providing paperwork and enforcing the requirements but should be compensated for such involvement.

   Importantly, if the government pursues a mandatory program animals branded in accordance with state brand laws must be considered compliant with whatever new requirements are contemplated. In other words, producers with branded

cattle in brand states are deemed to have met their burden and any buyer of such animals would incur the costs of adding any additional identification that the seller may need in the course of the seller's business.

3. In regard to cattle, individual identification would be achieved with an AIN tag that would be attached to the animal's left ear. It is acknowledged that some producers do not have the facilities to tag their animals; thus, the Draft Program Standards document contains an option for tagging sites, which are authorized premises where owners or persons responsible for cattle could have the cattle sent to have AIN tags applied. Do you think this is a viable option, *i.e.*, can markets or other locations successfully provide this service to producers who are unable to tag their cattle at their farms?

   Market operators should certainly have the option of providing this service, for a fee they deem suitable. This may reduce the burden on producers without adequate facilities.

4. The current Draft Strategic Plan does not specify how compliance with identification and movement reporting requirements will be achieved when the sale is direct between a buyer and seller (or through their agents). In what manner should compliance with these requirements be achieved? Who should be responsible for meeting these requirements? How can these types of transactions be inputted into the NAIS to obtain the necessary information in the least costly, most efficient manner?

   Under a voluntary system, the individuals will ensure that compliance occurs when needed. If the seller expects a benefit or profit from utilizing identification, he or she will ensure that the purchaser is aware of the identification and will pass along any information requested, to provide the maximum profit.

5. USDA suggests that animals should be identified anytime prior to entering commerce or being commingled with animals from other premises. Is this recommendation adequate to achieve timely traceback capabilities to support animal health programs or should a timeframe (age limit) for identifying the animals be considered? Please give the reasons for your response.

   There should be no requirement of identification under a voluntary system. If the purchaser desires different identification than the animal currently bears, it is his responsibility to apply it.

   Animals with different ownership that are commingled will likely already be identified for purposes of determining ownership.

   Group lot identification should be used when feasible, such as a single brand on loads of cattle from one particular premise.

6. Are the timelines for implementing the NAIS, as discussed in the Draft Strategic Plan, realistic, too aggressive (*i.e.*, allow too little time), or not aggressive enough

(*i.e.*, do not ensure that the NAIS will be implemented in a timely manner)? Please give the reasons for your response.

Implementation of any type of an animal identification program must not be even considered until after a cost/benefit analysis is completed, and it is deemed necessary. As an industry, we are continuing to better our tracking and identification systems on our own, for our own use. This will be ongoing and will result in sufficient traceability, in states with brand inspection or some other program for livestock traceback.

The USDA needs to bear in mind that implementing an expensive, complex program that isn't proven to work will prove to be more of a burden than a benefit. It will not only be financially costly, but will be costly in terms of time. The industry knows what will work the best, and will improve systems until they are successful.

There has not been a program suggested that provides sufficient confidentiality and safeguards to ensure that information will not be leaked. This must be done before a timeline is set.

7. Should requirements for all species be implemented within the same timelines, or should some flexibility be allowed? Please give the reasons for your response.

   It is unfair to require one industry to adhere to requirements that others don't. For example, if the cattle industry was forced to comply and other industries weren't we would suffer unfair economic disadvantages.

8. What are the most cost-effective and efficient ways for submitting information to the database (entered via the Internet, file transfer from a herd management computer system, mail, phone, third-party submission of data)? Does the type of entity (*e.g.*, producer, market, slaughterhouse), the size of the entity, or other factors make some methods for information submission more or less practical, costly, or efficient? Please provide supporting information if possible.

   This must be the producer's choice. No producer can be expected to make expensive purchases of technical equipment, such as a computer simply to make the job easier for the bureaucracy.

   If there is a system already in place, such as a brand inspection system, that entity should be responsible for housing the data and would need to provide information upon request.

9. We are aware that many producers are concerned about the confidentiality of the information collected in the NAIS. Given the information identified in the draft documents, what specific information do you believe should be protected from disclosure and why?

All information should be considered confidential. Only officials of the state's animal health departments and APHIS, the central data-base manager, should have access to the information and only in the case of a reported disease outbreak. There should be no industry participants able to access another's data. Neither individual collective data should be published at any time. Only upon the confirmation of a disease outbreak should the information be considered for public knowledge. Even at that point, it should be agreed to by the state animal health board prior to release of information.

10. The NAIS as planned would require States, producers, and other participating entities to provide information and develop and maintain records. How could we best minimize the burden associated with these requirements? For example, should both the seller and the buyer of a specific group of animals report the movement of the animals, or is reporting by one party adequate?

    It is the seller's responsibility to provide verification. In states with brand inspection, the inspecting agency would have the information on hand, and available upon request by USDA or the state animal health agency.

11. A key issue in the development of the NAIS concerns the management of animal tracking information. Animal heath officials must have immediate, reliable, and uninterrupted access to essential NAIS information for routine surveillance activities and in the event of a disease outbreak. APHIS determined that this goal could best be achieved by having the data repositories managed by APHIS. The Draft Program Standards document provides for two main NAIS information repositories: The National Premises Information Repository and the National Animal Records Repository. The National Premises Information Repository would maintain data on each production and animal holding location (contact name, address, phone number, type of operation, etc.). The National Animal Records Repository would maintain animal identification and movement data. Recently, however, an industry-led initiative suggested a privately managed database as an alternative for the management of data on animal tracking in the NAIS. The industry group stated that a private database would ensure that the needs of both government and industry would be fulfilled, and that the flow of information throughout the NAIS would be maintained in a secure and confidential manner. APHIS is requesting comment from stakeholders regarding the utility of a privately managed database for holding animal location and movement information. Among the issues you may wish to comment on are the following:

    Animal health agencies within states should be the only entities allowed to access data. If a separate agency within the state is responsible for brand inspection and management of paperwork, the two entities will work together to ensure that data will be available at any time upon the request of the state animal health official.

    This is being discussed as a matter of national security, and therefore should not be handled by a national private organization.

12. How should a private database system be funded? Please give the reasons for your response.

    Any program shall be voluntary, and shall therefore be funded by the industry. There shall be no mandatory requirements. Current identification systems such as brucellosis tagging that may be fully or partially subsidized shall continue.

13. Should the NAIS allow for multiple privately managed databases? Please explain why or why not.

    No national organization should be allowed to manage data as sensitive as is being discussed. Private management or a national security database would allow for the possibility of discrimination and/or excessive profiteering. Because identification is so different in different region, and there is no “one size fits all” answer, it would not be feasible for one national organization to handle such a program. Local control is necessary for any identification program to work.

14. Should a public (government) system be made available as well as a privately managed system so that producers would have a choice? Please give the reasons for your response.

    Current systems should continue to work as they currently are. If new programs are started, let local industry decide how best to handle them.

15. Should a privately managed system include all species? Please give the reasons for your response.

    The same rules should apply to all species.

16. Would either system work equally well at the State level? Please explain why or why not.

    States with working brand inspection systems should continue as they are. They provide the best way to track cattle at this time. It is necessary that all states are comfortable communicating with one another, even if they use different traceback systems.