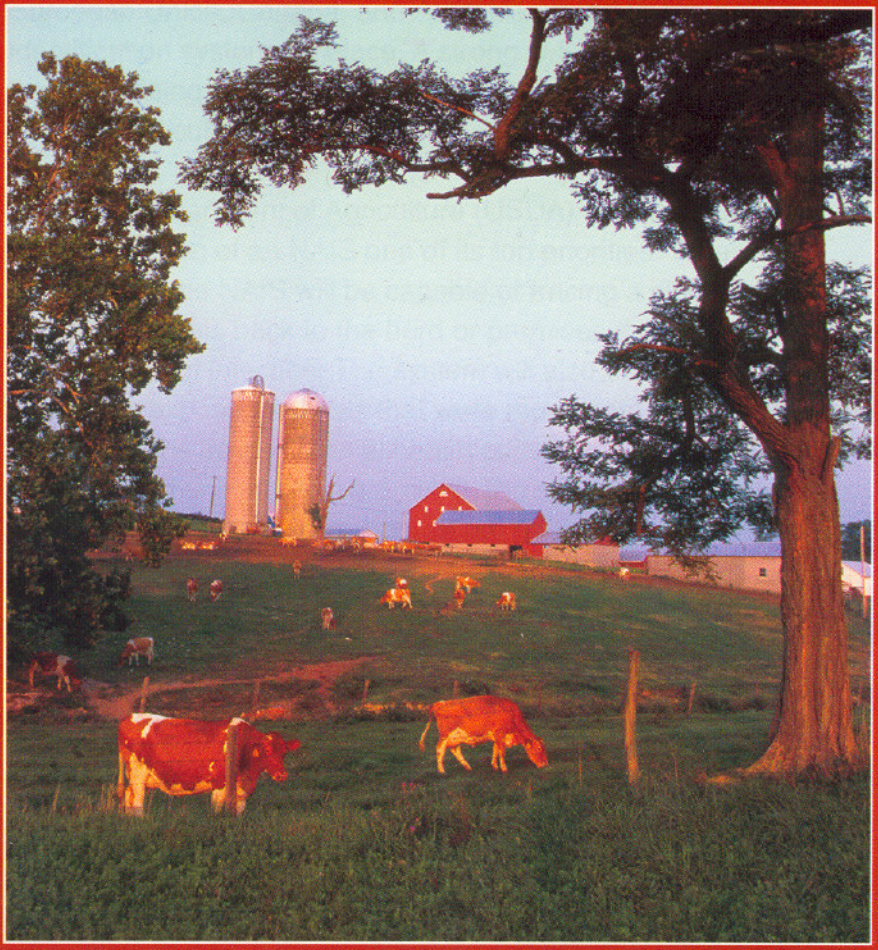
United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Premises Identification

The First Step Toward a National Animal Identification System

Program Aid No. 1800



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720–2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326–W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250–9410 or call (202) 720–5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Photo credits: The cover photograph was taken by USDA Agricultural Research Service photographer Scott Bauer. Captions indicate the source of all images inside the brochure.

Issued October 2004

The first step in implementing a national animal identification system (NAIS) is identifying and registering premises that are associated with the animal agriculture industry.

What should producers know about the NAIS?

The number of animal disease outbreaks that have been reported around the globe over the past decade—and the single cow in the United States that tested positive for bovine spongiform encephalopathy in December 2003—have greatly intensified public interest in developing a national animal identification program for the purpose of protecting animal health. The European Union, Canada, and Australia already have animal identification systems in place. A strong U.S. identification system is in increasing demand as a necessary component of our Nation's agricultural infrastructure.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has made the implementation of an NAIS one of its top priorities. When fully operational, the NAIS will be capable of tracing a sick animal or group of animals back to the herd or premises that is the most likely source of infection. The system will also be able to trace potentially exposed animals that were moved out from that herd or premises. The sooner animal health officials can identify infected and exposed animals and premises, the sooner they can contain the disease and stop its spread.

USDA's long-term goal is to establish a system that can identify within 48 hours all premises and animals that have had direct contact with a foreign animal disease or a domestic disease of concern. To meet this goal, USDA must develop a practical yet comprehensive infrastructure that collects and records information about the movements of animals. Premises registration is vital to this effort.

Why is premises registration the first step of the NAIS?

The identification of premises that allow for the commingling of animals (production points) is the foundation of the NAIS and must be established before animals can be tracked. Knowing where animals are located is the key to efficient, accurate, and cost-effective epidemiologic investigations and disease-control efforts. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), working with State and Tribal cooperators, will assign unique premises identification numbers to actual locations involved in livestock commerce or the movement of animals or poultry. In the event of an animal disease outbreak, animal health authorities will have this premises location data at their fingertips to ensure that disease investigations progress rapidly and efficiently.

After premises are registered, another component of the NAIS—animal identification—will be integrated into the system. Unique animal identification numbers will be issued to individually

Premises identification numbers will be assigned to actual locations, such as this Colorado farmstead. The "prem I.D." number will remain tied to the location, not to the person or company that owns it. *(USDA photo by John White.)*

identified premises. In the case of animals that move in groups through the production chain—such as swine and poultry—producers themselves will be able to assign unique identifiers to each lot based on a standard protocol. (During a transition period, certain current animal identification methods will also be accepted into the NAIS.)

After both premises and animals are identified in this uniform manner, the ultimate goal of the NAIS—animal tracking—will become possible. When identified animals travel through the production chain or to fairs or exhibition sites, their numbers will be linked to each identified premises where they are moved or mixed with animals from other premises. In this way, a travel record of each animal will be created through the input of State, Federal, and industry participants.

Participation of auction barns and livestock markets, such as the one pictured above, is integral to the success of the NAIS. These premises are animal concentration points where livestock from many disparate locations commingle. In the event of an animal disease outbreak, epidemiologists need to be able to trace an animal's movements to any premises where it might have been infected or exposed other animals to the disease. *(Photo provided by Tod Fleming of the Equity Cooperative Livestock Sales Association and reproduced with their kind permission.)*

Define "premises."

In terms of the NAIS, a premises is any geographically unique location associated with animal agriculture that would allow for the commingling or movement of animals or poultry or that is involved in commerce. Under this definition, farms, ranches, feedyards, auction barns, and livestock exhibitions and fair sites are all examples of premises.

The exact definition of "premises" will be determined by each State's or Tribe's animal health authority. Local animal health officials will be better able to address regional variations in production systems and methods, including how to identify open range and public grazing lands such as those found in the West. *(USDA Agricultural Research Service photos by Scott Bauer [sheep] and Jack Dykinga [cattle].)*

Each State's or Tribe's animal health authority, working in conjunction with Federal officials, will determine a more precise definition of premises for areas under its purview. A "one-size-fits-all" definition of a premises is not always possible, even if everyone adheres to the same general principle of identifying the location of animals. Differences in production systems and methods from one region to another will need to be taken into account. For instance, livestock in Western States are commonly raised at least part of the year on open range and public grazing lands, while those in the Midwest are more typically raised on privately owned farms year 'round. The best way to address such issues is to rely on the expertise of the animal health officials at the local level. They know the producers and the type of production systems in their area.

What are the components of the National Premises Identification System?

The National Premises Identification System includes the premises number allocator, premises registration systems, and a national premises information repository. These are all necessary components of the overall NAIS.

The **premises number allocator** is maintained at the national level. Through this allocator, USDA can assign a unique premises number to a valid address or other verifiable location description where animals may come into contact with each other (e.g., a ranch, farm, livestock market, or slaughter establishment) or to an address that has some other association with the animal industry (e.g., a diagnostic laboratory or a veterinary clinic). A single premises number will be used for each location, regardless of the number of species associated with it. In other words, a producer will not have a separate premises identification number for beef, dairy, swine, etc. Check with your State's or Tribe's animal health authority for further clarification regarding what you need to do to register your premises.

A **premises registration system** is a database program. It stores necessary information about the premises, which is assigned a unique identification number. In the event of an animal health investigation, the information collected through the premises registration system would allow animal health officials to get in touch with the appropriate contact person quickly.

States and Tribes are responsible for handling premises registration in areas under their purview. Through premises registration systems, they will be collecting information such as the premises street address, the name and telephone number of the person authorities should contact during a disease traceback involving the premises, and the type of operation (market, farm, etc.). In addition, the date that information about the premises was initiated and the date it was "deactivated" are kept so the appropriate people (with knowledge of animals on the premises during the time in question) can be located. Data will be maintained for 20 years. The information collected through these systems will be vital to stopping future disease outbreaks and completing existing eradication programs.

APHIS is providing a *standardized premises registration system* that States and Tribes may elect to use. However, some of these entities may opt instead to use a system that they developed or that a third party developed. State and Tribal authorities will determine which premises registration system will be used in their area. As long as the system has been evaluated by USDA and found to be compliant with the national data standards and with other technical requirements (e.g., communication integrity and system security), it may be used.

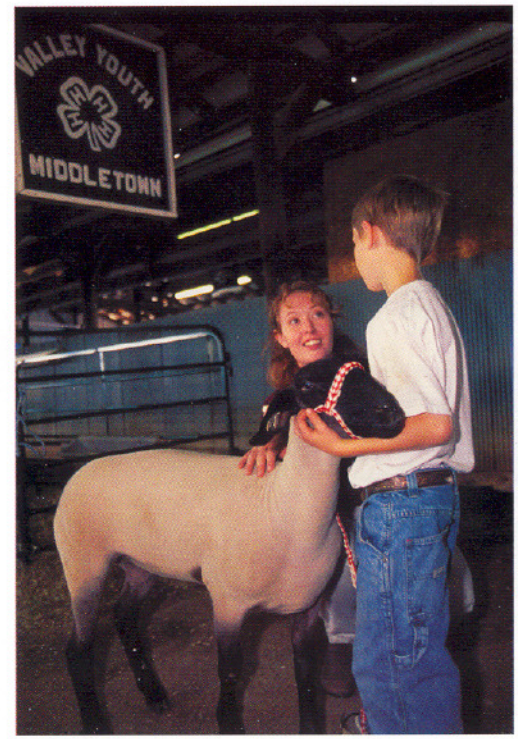
Certain pieces of data entered into the premises registration system will be forwarded electronically to a **National Premises Information Repository.** The information repository centralizes agreed-upon data and is necessary to support the overall NAIS. For example, the National Premises Information Repository will

allow APHIS to record which Animal Identification Numbers (AINs) are distributed to a specific premises (see below for more information on AINs). AIN managers will use the National Premises Information Repository to confirm that a producer has a valid Premises Identification Number before official animal identification numbers will be distributed to that location.

What types of numbers will be assigned through the National Premises Identification System?

Two types of numbers will be incorporated into the NAIS through the national premises identification system.

National Premises Identification Numbers are nationally unique numbers. USDA will assign one permanent number to each premises (location) involved in animal agriculture through State and Tribal premises-registration systems. The premises number



Fair and exhibition sites will require premises identification numbers because livestock often commingle with animals from other herds during shows. An entity that is involved in the NAIS but does not manage or hold livestock (e.g., a breed registry or tag manufacturer) will require a Nonproducer Participant Number to take part in any aspect of the NAIS. *(APHIS photo by R. Anson Eaglin.)*

will not change when a property is sold. National Premises Identification Numbers contain seven alphanumeric characters. Example: A123R69.

USDA and State and Tribal cooperators will also assign unique **Nonproducer Participant Numbers** to those entities that are involved in the NAIS but do not manage or hold livestock. Such entities include breed registries, identification providers, service providers, veterinarians, and others. These entities will be required to have an official Nonproducer Participant Number in order to participate in any aspect of the NAIS. APHIS is establishing enrollment or application procedures for nonproducer participants.

Nonproducer Participant Numbers will follow the same numbering scheme as premises identification numbers. As such, Nonproducer Participant Numbers will contain seven alphanumeric characters. Example: H892345.

What do producers and others need to do to register their premises under the NAIS?

Because USDA is phasing in the NAIS, all States and Tribes will be moving forward with premises registration over time. Check with your State's or Tribe's animal health authority or with your local Extension agent for more information about when you can register your premises and how to do it.

Does it cost anything to register a premises?

The decision of whether to charge an administrative fee is up to each State.

Why can't USDA–APHIS use the Farm Service Agency's numbers or the Food and Drug Administration's numbers or some other type of number already in existence to register farms and ranches?

The NAIS is a standardized system designed to protect animal health. Through it, APHIS will assign nationally unique numbers to animal premises based on their specific geographic locations.

Most "farm numbers" currently in existence do not meet APHIS' needs for one or more of the following reasons: they are county or State specific, so the numbers distributed through them are not nationally unique; they correlate a number with the address of the individual who owns the farm or ranch instead of with the actual geographic location of the animals; or they assign numbers that are subject to change based on ownership of the land.

Under the NAIS, a premises number would remain the same for a specific tract of land even if ownership of that property changes.

The NAIS requires that each premises receive a nationally unique number based on geographic location. Under the NAIS, the farm pictured above would always retain the same premises identification (e.g., A123R69), regardless of who owns it. *(USDA photo by Keith Weller.)*

What happens after producers register their premises?

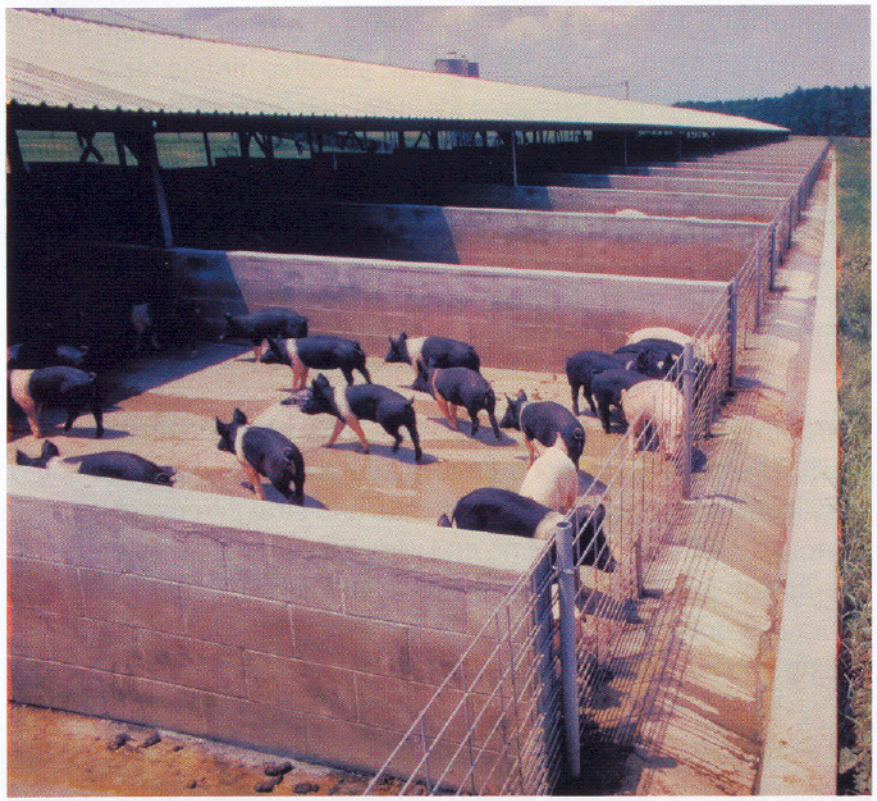
Following premises registration, producers may participate in animal identification and tracking programs as provided in their area. As the NAIS progresses, the AIN will be implemented. USDA will issue AINs to animal identification managers, who will be responsible for producing AIN devices. The AIN managers will also manage the AIN distribution network. Once this system is in place, producers will be able to contact an AIN distributor in their area to obtain official AINs. The identification will be attached to the animals in a way that is appropriate for the species. For example, cattle producers may use eartags on their animals, while LaMancha goat producers may require a different type of identification method because their animals have very small ears.

Potential AIN distributors include breed associations, Federal area offices, State departments of agriculture, and identification companies, among others. Producers should check with their Federal, State, or Tribal animal health authority to determine whom they should be contacting about AINs.

The AIN will allow a single animal to be identified with a lifetime number that can be printed on a tag, affixed, or assigned to the animal. Certain methods, as determined by industry, may include electronic chips encased in a tag. The AIN may also be associated with the animal's biometrics (DNA, retinal image, etc.). The format for the AIN is 15 numeric characters, the first three reflecting the internationally recognized country code for the United States (840). Example: 840123456789012.

An AIN distributor will submit to a national information repository a record of the numbers provided to each premises. By obtaining numbers from an AIN distributor, the producer will, in effect, automatically provide a record of the animal's origin (or the location of where it was initially identified in the early stages of the NAIS).

Group/Lot Identification Numbers may be an option for species in which animals move as a group through the production chain (e.g., swine and poultry). Group/Lot identification numbers contain the national premises identification number of the location where the group was established and a six-digit number reflecting the date the group was created. This format will result in a unique number. Example: A234567100302. In this example, "A234567" is the premises identification number and "100302" represents the date the record was created, October 3, 2002.



Once the NAIS is fully implemented, producers should be able to register their premises and then contact a USDA-approved animal identification number manager to obtain official AINs. Group/lot identification numbers will be an option for species, such as swine, that typically move as a group through the production chain. *(USDA photo by Gene Alexander.)*

Please note: *Other identification numbering systems defined in the* Code of Federal Regulations *will remain official through an NAIS transition period. Producers should check with a State, Federal, or Tribal animal health authority for more information about obtaining AINs and Group/Lot identification numbers for various species.*

Will this information be kept confidential?

USDA is aware of producers' concerns about the confidentiality of information collected as part of the NAIS and is taking them very seriously as APHIS explores the most effective means for collecting animal and premises identification information. Accordingly, USDA is investigating various options for protecting the information in the NAIS from public disclosure. It is important to note that the national repositories will include information only for animal and disease tracking purposes.

When will the NAIS be fully implemented?

Currently, USDA has no set timeline for fully implementing the NAIS. The identification of premises and animals, while requiring significant resources, is a fundamental and straightforward objective. However, collecting and reporting animal movement information to establish a travel record of each animal's life is an enormous undertaking, requiring significant development and testing and substantial infrastructure.

Because of its complexity, USDA plans on phasing in the NAIS to provide a timely and cost-effective program while ensuring that it is functional, practical, and reliable. Initially, the program will be implemented on a voluntary basis, but USDA may eventually require premises and animal identification. Some States have already enacted legislation to make certain aspects of the NAIS mandatory within their borders.