

Joining FORCES

National FFA Organization partners with USDA to advance National Animal Identification System.

By Kati McQueen

This is the seventh in a yearlong series focusing on the NAIS.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National FFA Organization have joined forces to educate the agriculture industry about the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) and to help promote premises registration.

The two organizations signed this cooperative agreement on June 4 at the USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. As part of the agreement, the FFA will develop and distribute educational materials for its current and alumni members, and assist in advancing premises registration across the country.

Premises identification is the first of three phases of the voluntary NAIS, a response system designed to help animal-health officials trace animals to their origin within 48 hours of a disease outbreak. This phase provides producers with a seven-digit premises number, or PIN, after they submit farm and contact information to the state. Animal identification and animal tracing are the second and third NAIS phases.

According to the USDA, 409,791 premises were registered as of Aug. 6.

The FFA's goal is to register 50,000 more premises by the partnership's end on May 31, 2008, according to Bruce Knight, undersecretary for the USDA's marketing and regulatory programs.

"The FFA has pledged to help us encourage farmers and ranchers to take the first step and register their premises," Knight says.

Five-part program. The USDA has appropriated about \$6 million to work with organizations to help with



premises registration. Partnerships have already been created with the National Pork Producers Council and the National Pork Board, Knight says.

Armed with \$600,000 in funds from the USDA, the FFA has developed a five-part program to help the USDA in its goal of registering more

premises, says Will Waidelich, FFA's senior director of research, development and sponsored programs.

The organization will first develop classroom instructional materials about the NAIS to be distributed online through its AgEd Learning Center. Materials will be available to teachers starting at the National FFA Convention on Oct. 24-27 in Indianapolis, Ind.

State-specific registration materials will also be created for FFA members who choose to register their premises.

As part of the program, community-outreach kits will be produced so FFA chapters can host workshops with community groups to promote the NAIS.

The FFA will also use its *New Horizons* magazine and its monthly television show on RFD-TV to increase awareness of the NAIS.

Lastly, the FFA will host a recognition ceremony to acknowledge chapters that successfully participated in the program. A handful of members from a few chapters will be chosen to win a trip to the USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C., to meet USDA officials and congressmen in summer 2008.

Educational value. This program will provide teachers with materials to educate students about the value of using the premises-iden-



(Above) Bruce Knight (front l), undersecretary for the United States Department of Agriculture, shakes hands with Larry Case (front r), chief executive officer and national adviser of the National FFA Organization, at a signing ceremony entering the USDA and FFA into a cooperative agreement to advance the implementation of the National Animal Identification System. (Right) Knight speaks to media, government officials and FFA state officers from Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia during the ceremony. Photos courtesy of the FFA.

tification program and about animal-health issues, Waidelich says.

While participation in the program is voluntary, Waidelich hopes teachers see the importance of using it in their chapters and classrooms.

“We try to put together outreach programs that have a strong educational component, so chapters will see a value in them and take advantage of them,” Waidelich says.

Kent Schescke, FFA’s senior director of partnership development, says the FFA’s primary focus is on educational opportunities.

“This is an opportunity to educate young people about an important issue that is shaping agriculture,” Schescke says. “When we can bring education about real-life, current issues into classrooms, that’s when we believe we’re really delivering the most value.”

These lessons will also help students and communities better understand the NAIS, Schescke says.

“This program wasn’t created to convince people to be pro or con, but

to help people understand,” Schescke says. “There’s a lot of information out there, but none of it has been presented in such a way that teachers had the resources to teach about it.”

For FFA members who have livestock, these lessons will equip them with essential information to make decisions about their participation in the NAIS, Waidelich says.

“We hope this outreach program will make them think about animal health as a part of the programming on their farms,” he says. “We hope they will understand how animal-health events can affect their programming, and then they can make better-informed decisions.”

Teaching students about the NAIS will prepare them for the more than 300 careers in agriculture, Schescke says.

“Understanding the NAIS and its impact on agriculture is going to be im-



portant for their careers,” Schescke says.

The program will also ensure their futures as producers, and Knight says he hopes FFA chapters will participate and encourage premises registration within their communities.

“As this nation’s next farmers, it’s fitting that they are at the forefront of the NAIS, and we are excited about their involvement,” Knight says. “I was involved in FFA and 4-H growing up, so I’ve got a soft spot for youth-development programs. When I was in FFA, I sold fruit to my neighbors. If I was able to get them to buy boxes of oranges from me then, I hope they will help us with premises registration now.” **SP**