

Prepare FOR THE WORST

By Kati McQueen

This is the second in a yearlong series focusing on the National Animal Identification System.

When a series of winter storms dropped up to 53 inches of snow on Colorado in late December and early January, the state's department of agriculture had to react immediately to ensure the safety of its livestock.

Thanks to the United States Department of Agriculture's National Animal Identification System (NAIS), the state agency was able to make 300 phone calls to contact swine producers across the state to check on the well-being of their hogs. Producers who had voluntarily registered their premises through the NAIS were able to be contacted by the Colorado Department of Agriculture to find out if they needed help or had access to feed.

Carried out by states and tribes, premises identification is the foundation of the NAIS, a response system implemented in 2004 to help animal-health officials respond quickly and

effectively to animal-health events in the United States. Premises registration gives producers a premises identification number, or PIN, after they provide specific information – company name, type of operation, address, phone number and contact person. This contact information is stored at the state level, only to be used in an event

for the Colorado Department of Agriculture, says premises records were essential in the state's recent emergency relief effort.

"The emergency management officials told us that seven counties were severely affected, and the premises records allowed us to contact those specific producers more quickly," Maulsby says. "Premises ID registrations helped

us to identify where people were, what their needs were, and how to respond."

The most catastrophic storm to affect Colorado's livestock hit in 1997, which killed 30,000

head of cattle, Maulsby says. However, this winter's four consecutive storms, and a total of about 50 inches of snow, has been the worst damage to the swine herds, Maulsby says.

Maulsby says he is unsure of how many hogs were killed in the storms, but says a couple barns collapsed and a few producers lost some hogs.

“Premises ID registrations helped us to identify where people were, what their needs were and how to respond.”

– John Mulsby, Colorado's state veterinarian, on how the NAIS aided the state in locating producers affected by recent winter storms

which would threaten animal health.

The other two components of the NAIS are animal identification and animal tracing. Of the three, premises ID is the most critical in promoting animal health and preventing the spread of animal disease, according to the NAIS Web site.

John Mulsby, state veterinar-



Joy Philippi, president of the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) and member of the Swine Industry Identification Task Force, says most producers forget that their herds can be affected by natural disasters, as well as diseases. The NPPC is encouraging that premises ID registration be mandatory to protect the food supply and international trade market.

"Health of the U.S. livestock herd is the most important thing that we have when it comes to agriculture," Philippi says. "We provide food, and we believe that we need healthy animals to continue to supply a strong, healthy food supply."

Participation in the NAIS is still voluntary at the federal level, but states can choose to make it mandatory based on their local needs. Because the USDA has not approved a government mandate, it has instead provided the National Pork Board with a \$400,000 grant to aid the swine industry in registering 100 percent of its premises, Philippi says.

There have been 362,720 premises registered out of an estimated 1.4 million livestock farms in the

United States as of Feb. 20.

Philippi says the grant will be used to hire fieldmen to meet with state ID coordinators and talk to swine producers face to face to encourage them to comply with the NAIS and industry ID standards.

About 40 percent of premises are currently registered, and the goal of the effort is to get the remaining 60 percent registered by the end of 2007, which Philippi says is a realistic ambition.

To achieve this goal, Philippi says they must convince producers that if a threat occurred, containing and eliminating the problem quickly is key.

"If a pig at my house were to get a foreign animal disease, the state would have the capability to locate and contact all the premises within a certain radius of me, and that is the key," Philippi says. "If there is a problem, we don't want to distribute it nationwide or incubate it to all of my pigs and all of my neighbor's pigs."

Producers can prepare for the worst and protect their investments by registering their premises in case of an animal-health event. Philippi says the

terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, showed the country's vulnerability for any type of threat, including one in the food system.

"The events of 9/11 raised our conscious level on so many areas," Philippi says. "I work in agriculture, so I got to thinking about what would happen if someone were to attack our food system. If there is a problem, I want someone to be able to find me."

The NAIS proved it was effective in Colorado's recent winter storms. Producers who registered their premises in Colorado were able to be contacted right away, Maulsby says.

"The emergency center got a test, and we were able to respond to an extreme animal crisis because of the contact information we have from the NAIS," Maulsby says.

"It gave us another avenue to contact people and the ability to use our resources more effectively."

Producers can find out how to register their premises by visiting the NAIS Web site at <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml> or by contacting their state pork association or board of health. **S**