

USDA
Yellow Breakout
May 21, 2009

FS: —key. I work with APHIS in Riverdale, Maryland in the Program and Policy Development staff. I'm here as a facilitator. We're a small enough group—if it's okay with all of you—we'd rather just have each person come up and make their comment or express their views from this microphone. All of the comments will be recorded for the transcriptionist, so we have to use the microphones in every room. We do have handheld mics if there's an issue that someone doesn't want to come up to the front, but I think it might just be easier if we just use one central mic and conversation can take place. So is there anyone right off the bat that would like to make the first comment or initiate a discussion.

MS: I will.

FS: Come on up, and please remember to state your name—and organization if you choose to, but at least your name so the transcriptionist can get all that straight. Thanks.

PM: Thank you. Again, I'm Perry Mobley with Alabama Farmers Federation. I'm a commodity division director—over three commodities: beef, equine, and hay and forage crops, which hay and forage is not a question here today. I know we're supposed to be thinking about how we can make NAIS work, and I see an individual in the back of the room that has spent a lot of his lifetime working on this program—and for the right reasons—and I appreciate your diligence, Dr. [s/l Reemers] and those others that have worked with you.

However, I think—and I believe—that it would be safe to say, based on the comments that were made this morning that it's time to scrap NAIS as is. We believe, as Alabama Farmers Federation, that disease surveillance and programs—like our TB program, Johnes program, the list goes on and on, AI—are very valid programs, and they do protect our animal populations. However, Congress—USDA—have seen reason to cut those programs in the past few years, and TB continues to be an extremely important issue to us in the cattle business, especially in the dairy and beef industries, especially with our trading partners in Mexico and the problems that we have in Texas and New Mexico.

We would certainly like to see—I guess our solution to the issue is to place emphasis on those programs at this time—allow us, as independent producers, to determine what types of or methods of identification are best for us. I know that because we work with our state animal health officials so closely, that they would like the opportunity and the ability to rapidly respond to an animal disease outbreak, and we want them to have that opportunity. And the main thing they need to know is where those livestock are. We have been a proponent in the past of the premises registration format. I don't think that we are abandoning that position, but to enforce or to mandate an individual animal identification system, at this time, would be the wrong thing to do—it'd be too costly, too cumbersome.

There is, as you've heard today, extremely little support for such a system, and I think that if USDA decides to do that, I want to remind USDA that they are the people's department. The USDA belongs to us, the taxpayers of this country, and those that, I guess, influence USDA from a political point of view probably could be committing political suicide, if you will, if they go forward with this system without the support of the people of the United States. Thank you.

CS: My name's Chad Scott, and I'm a member of too many organizations to name right now, all of which—or at least half—are probably opposed to the National Animal Identification System, and a couple were set up just for that purpose. And I have found various websites, such as NAISsucks.com, www.NoNAIS.org, Farmer-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, Liberty Art Coalition, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, Ranchers Cattlemen Action Legal Fund—all of those are against NAIS and two, four or five of those were set up just to stop it—and that's their only purpose is to stop NAIS.

Also, I went to West Point Stockyards where a lot of people know my dad, but not everybody knows me. I worked there for a couple years, and I just went up through the crowd. I had a petition against NAIS—I have it right here in my hand today—I got over 100 signatures, and not one independent producer said they wouldn't sign it. And in the petition, it says to stop NAIS and halt the funding, and every independent producer signed it.

And from this meeting, what I gathered is that everybody who is independent that went up there was against the NAIS, and everybody that was a group—a member of a group like LMA, NCBA—they were for it. And I've read in literature where the USDA has given large sums of money to 4-H, NCBA, and all those organizations before it, so I don't know if they're registering people because they actually think it's good or because the government's handing them out a couple hundred thousands of dollars.

And also, I have a quote right here from Dr. Max Thornsberry, a Missouri veterinarian—he used to own a processing plant, and he's very knowledgeable. And it kind of echoes what this guy said and what other people have said, but it says, "Whereas under the existing system, a cow's expected of a disease anywhere in the U.S. will bear a metal ear tag with a prefix number that identifies the state from which the animal originated. With a phone call to that state, the identity of the local veterinarian who applied the ear tag and the location of the original owner could be found. Quarantine and other containment measures if necessary could be immediately initiated. No awaiting to assess a computer, to assess the NAIS database that may be corrupted, and no need for the federal government to maintain private data on citizens."

I also got the Clay County Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution against NAIS, and the states of Missouri, Arizona, and Kentucky have state bills that are in opposition to NAIS. The Meade County Board of Supervisors in South Dakota has passed a resolution against NAIS. The Nevada Cattlemen's Association has passed a resolution against NAIS. And I'm not stopping here; I'm working with the state legislators of Mississippi to get a bill against NAIS, and that bill will be one that I wrote myself and it will be a lot tougher than the ones in Kentucky, Arizona, and Missouri. I'm also working with the governor of Mississippi and the State Board of Animal Health to fix the loopholes I see in this problem right now. And that is all I have for this comment at the moment.

KW: Hi, my name's [s/l Karen Winn]. I guess I'm a little bit confused about the format here because if we're having a discussion, it seems like a hard thing to do if everyone's looking at one person speaking from a microphone. I have a couple questions. I guess I'd like a list of the disease control programs that we need to be funding, and I'd like to know if we already have these FSA ID numbers, would that work as a premise registration for what ... is looking for. And I guess I also wonder about the market issue with traceability and the export markets. Is the cost just going to outweigh the benefits and so that's not such a big concern? And do we need to talk about that like this, or is there a better way to do it? Those are my questions.

MS: Chad, let me just clarify for you: For LMA, LMA is not for mandatory NAIS in that we have supported voluntary and we've received no monies—none of our markets have. What we've said, if they're going to move forward, there are certain things that they need to do, so we're just providing the information and input, just like you are. One thing I think that wasn't brought up in there that I didn't have time to mention was—and when I was in Washington last week, they were talking about, "Well, if we don't have an ID

system that is going to affect our international trade down the road," and I think that is totally bogus. I think that's just a reason they're using to push it.

There are a number of other political barriers that are causing—just like Japan not accepting our beef, North Korea—it's just a barrier and it doesn't—a lot of times—have to do with agriculture—it's dollars, what it comes down to. I think what the feds need to do—APHIS, USDA—is get out on actual farms—and I'm not talking the mega farms that have 300, 600 head—small farms here in the Southeast and the East Coast—see the type of facilities we're talking about, where they have the 10 and 20 cow herds. When our markets have to get cattle from these producers, they have to send the trailer with corrals to actually get the cattle trapped and get them loaded. They don't have head chutes, they can't put ear tags in their heads, they don't castrate, they don't dehorn—that's the type of producers we're talking about.

Also, a number of these producers are older—60 and up—and, again, week after week when I talk to our markets, those producers said, "When this program comes and I have to do it, I'm just going to get out." And we're already seeing an exodus of producers just because of their age. The other thing that I would like to point out was the traceability, which this has been pushed all along, is an animal ID for animal health and traceback. We currently have traceback—you can come to any market where an animal has sold and it may not be within the 24 or 48 hours, but I daresay there's been very few animals that have never been able to be traced back.

Last week when I was talking to one of our members in Nebraska, they had a TB suspect from a herd. They were able to trace it back, not only to that herd that it came from, but also where that individual producer had bought the animal. So the system is there. I think there are some fallacies to the way they're trying to sell the program—trying to sell it that we need those 48-hour turnaround. As far as foot and mouth disease, once we find it, it's going to be in three-fourths of the country anyway, so I don't think that's a legitimate reason.

As far as BSE, that takes years to come on. I don't see where 24 or 48 hours is going to make a big difference with BSE. Once you find the herd, they've been there for years and it's been building even before we knew it was there. So I think, again, there needs to be some truth, some transparency, and some trust built with USDA, and I hope these listening sessions are truly listening sessions and that USDA and the Secretary have their ears on. I hope Congress has their ears on and sees the disgust and dismay out here with the program that has spent so many dollars and accomplished so little.

FS: Thank you. Dr. [s/l Reemers] made an excellent suggestion and to try to bring about more conversation, more dialogue. We'd like to reconfigure ourselves into a circle, and then we can use the wireless mics to pass from one person to the next, rather than having the person up front. So if we could take a minute to try to do that.

MS: I think there is, obviously— Can they all hear me? Oh, I need this to be recorded, don't I?

FS: For the recording, right.

RB: Listen to me, Secretary. My name is Reid Blossom, and I just do want to clarify to Chad's point that I think there are very few organizations out there that are supportive of NAIS, as it is written now. And I want to clarify that Alabama Cattlemen's Association leadership feeling is that we would be supportive of a system that would give us an extra armament or an extra tool within our arsenal, selling more beef around the globe.

But we don't think that NAIS is that tool, as it's currently written, and for several facts, but the issue of confidentiality has not been necessarily addressed, the issue of liability of participants has not been addressed, the issue of clear funding has not been addressed. We've gotten from Kansas State a real round figure on what it could cost, but there's some grey area in that the entire livestock market sector is kind of written off and that those costs could be passed on.

Well, that's pretty tough to say, and as far as our organization and any Southeast producer organization, we're different from a lot of parts in the county in that we have a lot of small producers and we operate in an auction market system—and so any program that we support would take that into account. So that's, I guess, really where our state association stands.

PM: I just want to echo what Reid said from the Cattlemen's Association. I want to clarify a few things I said earlier. We have the utmost— I'm sorry. Perry Mobley, again, from the Alabama Farmers Federation. We have the utmost confidence in our state animal health officials, and we want to be able to provide them with tools to keep our livestock herds and flocks safe. Many of our producers who are also members of Alabama Cattlemen's Association and we represent about 20,000 big producers in Alabama. I don't know how many horse producers.

Basically, all of the dairy producers—what few we have left—have participated in an animal ID system to some degree. Many of our beef producers have gone the voluntary

route that was suggested a few years ago—the market-driven route. They now are deciding to abandon that. It has not paid them anything—it has done nothing but cost them money. The gentleman sitting next to me helps market quite a few of those cattle or does market quite a few of those cattle—and several thousand in the month of August. A lot of those cattle have a premises registration tied to them—they are source and age verified.

Those guys have told me this year—some of them decided last year—they don't want any part of it anymore because they have not seen the benefit of that system in terms of an increased price for their cattle. So they can't pass it on—the cost of the program—they can't pass it on. We in agriculture are price takers; we are not price makers. And the other thing I want to say: I've heard some language today that concerns me and concerns our organization and we've heard it before, but we represent all facets of agriculture in Alabama. We have 17 commodity divisions, of which seven of those are livestock or poultry. We have producers that are small and large, and as Reid Blossom said, the majority of our cattle producers are small—just like you said in Tennessee.

But there's a differentiation and there's language being used in this country that basically makes a large producer out to be an evil-doer. That, to me—and to our organization—is basically language that stifles success. Just because an individual owns 500, 1000, 10,000, that does not make them a mega farm or a factory farm. I have asked over and over for someone to give me an explanation or a definition of those type farms, and nobody really can give me a clear definition.

The fact of the matter is that 98 and a half percent of all of the farms in this country are family-owned. The majority of the farms in this country—the vast majority of the farms in this country—whether small or large are family-owned, and I would argue that most of those producers have the same sentiments that have been expressed here today. They do want our United States Department of Agriculture to be daily involved in the protection of the health of our livestock, but they do not want a mandated system that is going to have to be paid for with tax dollars or directly out of their pockets that has proven, over the past few years, to have many, many holes in it.

We're not opposed to keeping our animals healthy—it's in the best interest for all of us—but to call out one group of producers over another is wrong. People that may own 600 head of cattle now, they didn't always or their family haven't always owned that. They started out somewhere small. Some of these operations have been in business since the 1700s, especially in Georgia and Alabama, South Carolina, on the East Coast where our

forefathers landed and came here from Europe. They have grown their operations, and they have been successful, and we should not make that an evil thing.

We have some—what we consider to be—corporate operations out West that are still family corporations, and I know that they have the same sentiments that we do because I've heard them say it. We're for keeping our animals safe and healthy—keeping our food system safe and wholesome. We've done that, but we would like to ask USDA and Congress to put more emphasis on the programs that have been effective in the past and that will continue to be effective if they're adequately funded and adequately staffed as well. Thank you.

MS: ...that thing. I think that— Oh. [s/l Marguerite Stratton]. One of the things I think that is being put forward is not the bigger producer or the smaller producer, but the fact that they can take huge lots of animals with one tag and one reporting, whereas all the rest, whether they've got 600 or 100 or whatever—that one animal has got to be tagged and it's a cost animal per animal where these bigger places that are shipping big shipments out—they only have to do one. If they had to tag every animal they had and do the paperwork on every animal they had, they might not be so eager either.

And another thing that I have to say that really [s/l twerks] me up and cranks my crank is this premise ID business. Premise ID business is something that really burns me up. Number one, my house, my home—I've lived in there 40 years. Excuse me, it's not some premise ID thing—it's my home. Now, I'm already identified in land records, in tax records, in income tax records and social security numbers and all this kind of stuff. They don't have to look for me. They know where I'm at—they know where my home is at.

Now, tell me this: Why do I need another number to know where I live? I'm on E911; I'm on GPS satellite; I'm on all this garbage. Why do I need another number to tell me where I live? Now, that's what really burns me up. I don't need that. I don't need another premise ID. And what is even worse about that is that premise ID that is assigned to my house and my family is going to stay on that piece of property to the next guy and the next guy and the next guy. What if I want to market my house as just a home?

Okay. So the buyer that comes along—and this economy's real good for house selling—he's going to come along and he's saying, "I don't want a premise ID. I'm not buying your house. You can't sell it anyway." So why are we going to those routes? Why are we doing this? What is this premise ID business? I don't understand it at all. A person's

name is good enough. When they go to the sale barn, they sign their name on a ticket—on the tag. They know who they are. They don't need a premise ID to tell them who they are, and the animal is going to go—most of the time—with the people ...

Rita blows in and goes snorting down my pipe, I'm going to take my animals and I'm going to run down the road if I have to leave, otherwise I'm right there. They've just got to come and find me. And I went through Rita right there on that farm, trying to protect what little bit we had with my husband and an evacuee family. I'm not going anywhere. I don't need a premise ID. I bet you that five ancestors I had that fought in the Revolutionary War for our freedom—I bet they didn't have a premise ID either. I'm done.

RB: This is Reid Blossom again. I think part of the reason that premises ID is failing—we have spent so much money and so much time and registered 35 percent of what's estimated to be the livestock industry participants—is that we have tried to tie numbers to geographic locations. And there's a lot of our producers that rent land somewhere, and if you have that geographic location in a prem ID database and you can pinpoint the location of the land, you will not find Joe Smith on that location.

So if you were going to keep up a prem list, then it should have started with the common sense approach of "If there's an issue, I need to be able to contact the farmer. I do not need to be able to pinpoint the actual geographic longitude and latitude." I think that's one of the reasons that prem ID has been set up to fail.

MS: I agree.

MS: [Inaudible.]

KW: Well, I guess one— Sorry, [s/l Karen Winn]. I guess can we talk about disease control programs that do work?

RB: I think it's interesting to note that brucellosis took some 80-odd years to be effective. I mean, it does work, and we can look to it as a program that protects the industry, but it also was not a program that happened overnight.

JK: This is John Kisse, Livestock Marketing again. On the brucellosis program—and the reason it took 80 years—is I've been calling the ID program—to many of our people—"the new brucellosis program" because it starts, it stops, it's 180 degrees from where it started, and that's why there's no trust and people—farmers, especially, with their mindset

and being independent—said, "Well, you all don't know what you're doing, so I'm not going to even get started in it."

MS: The scrapie program.

JK: And those that have started in the program, as I mentioned earlier, we had some markets out west that—"Well, this is coming. I'm going to get in on the ground floor,"—they spent the money, they put the readers in, went with the specific tag company, and now, that stuff is obsolete. And the technology, the way it advances, what we're looking at now wasn't even here a couple years ago, and we're finding that what we have now does not work. So we're trying to get the cart before the horse, if you have people that even want a program. And, as I think you've seen, many people are not even going to buy into the program, regardless of what we do.

MS: Well, we started with a— Excuse me. [s/l Marguerite Stratton] again. We started with the very first part of the scrapie program, and we'd done all the mess—we filled out all the paperwork, we got our numbers, our tags, the whole mess—and do you know where the scrapie program is right now? It's in the trash bin, and it has been for a couple of years. All of that mess we went through to try to make our animals—we were right on being completely scrapie-free certified and all this kind of mess when they says, "Poof!" and it's in the trash bag.

You mean I went out there and I was so crazy about all these tags and I made sure every sheep didn't catch their ear in a fence and they kept the tags and I changed the numbers and I did all these records, and for what? I spent all this money and all this time for what? The system's broke.

CS: Chad Scott again from Mississippi. And to respond to you about the large producers, me and my daddy have about 100 head of cattle, and at the sale barn, we deal with people who might have a few cows in their backyard and bring them in from the trailer. But also, my uncle has Scott Livestock Company in Alabama—he has tens of thousands of acres—and then in West Point, you also have the [s/l Brown family]—you're talking about owning livestock auction there on the slaughterhouse. They own the whole nine yards.

And from my study and my research, here's the problem: I have reports of the United Nations and the World Health Organization wrote this plan for the NAIS and sent it over here or they were over here and they wrote it. We have those officials. And so that leads me to distrust that. And then I'm trying to fight against those, and sometimes it leads me

against people like you, people like you that I'm not even against. We're both on the exact same side, and sometimes you don't even know who to be mad at. But like just this past spring, we dealt with the JBS lawsuit where the Brazilian meat packer firm tried to buy three feedlots in America and two slaughterhouses or two packing companies, and that would've made them the largest meat packer in America and would've made our market more vertically integrated.

And if you look at what has happened to the hog and chicken industry, the corporations have a lot more control over than they did in the early 1980s, and that's what we're scared of happening to the cattle industry. We're scared of that; we're apprehensive about that. In Tyson Corporation, I've studied them somewhat. I've also looked at some of the groups who are very dominant in American politics and the role that they have with administrations—their members get appointed to cabinet-level positions, the easy access they have with politicians, Congress, every branch of government, and it makes me apprehensive.

But probably everybody in this room is on the same page—it just sounds like we're not. And I definitely agree with everything you said out there, and I feel like we're on the same page and probably most members in most groups. And I think even within the USDA, these people right here are probably good people, but at the very top of the USDA—especially George Bush's Secretary of Agriculture, I very much do not trust him.

And so, I mean, people can take that for whatever they want to, but I have reports that in the Idaho state brand program, they took the whole state program—16,000 producers—and registered them with a premise ID without their consent. Also, I've heard reports in Colorado and Illinois where they're requiring kids who participate in the State Fair Board have a premise ID in order to do so. And I'm, right now, investigating Mississippi to see if we have that.

One guy told me we did and one lady told me we didn't, but I bet ... that he had to register his farm as a premise for his son to go to the State Fair Board. And if this NAIS is so great and really need this premise, why can't we just come out and a USDA official comes over to me and we register it? We don't need all of this underhanded stuff that's going on. And so that's some of the questions and concerns that I have with this program and some of the allegations that I've dealt with.

MS: It's [s/l Marguerite Stratton] again. [Inaudible.] When I stop and think about people being forced to register a premise ID, I get back to the Constitution of our United States where we had the freedom and the right to say and do what we need and what we want.

And it just seems to me like it's stifling our freedom to say, "You have to participate in order for your child to do anything," or to force a child to register their parents' premise so they can participate in some kind of activity that is designed to make them grow up to be stronger and better individuals. Why do we have to do this? This is a child.

And not only that, but when we say 4-H kids have got to register their parents' premise ID because they're showing an animal, somehow I got lost. I don't see it, I don't like it, and I think it's wrong. And I don't think that it does anything for us to say that we have to do these things when the Constitution and the Bill of Rights gives us a lot better standards—and they're violating them. They're violating the freedoms right, left, and what's going to happen is we're going to have a huge amount of lawsuits because people are going to get mad enough to actually go and fight about it.

And then we're going to get other people that are not even going to participate; and these groups that are established for the children to become better citizens are going to lose so many participants, they're going to dissipate—they won't even be there anymore. People are going to get—our economy's horrible. We don't need any more of this.

MS: I would like for these two gentlemen and this gentleman right here to comment on the HACCP—do you all know what I'm talking about?

MS: Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point.

MS: That took the federal inspectors out of the slaughterhouses, is that correct? What did it do? Somebody explain to me what that is.

JE: This is Josh Elmore, Auburn University, member of numerous organizations as well, a cattle producer in Alabama and Mississippi, so I will not be commenting for the university at this point. The HACCP program started in 1999. It identified hazard analysis and critical control points—problems in the food service industry at the packing house level, such as E. coli, undercooked meats, Listeria problems. Basically, USDA has federal inspectors there in the plants at the slaughter level as well as the fully cooked level. They go through and identify group and lot information.

The plant itself does that, then the USDA inspector follows behind that and the reports that are done quarterly throughout the day—it could be once a day, depending on what kind of program's involved. Having worked in a poultry processing business for a few years right out of college, I was there at the implementation of HACCP. It was a program that did work at the small level as well as the large level. Still, you do have

problems that you read about. But as far as HACCP taking federal inspectors out of the plants, no.

MS: I read it reduced somewhere. I don't know. I mean—

JE: No. Also, speaking as a producer who's been involved with a lot of different programs here in the state from premises registration to working with electronic tags all over the state, the premises registration, we've had—as we've seen today—varied opinions on why people want to register or why we require registrations for such 4-H programs, for example. We require the child's birth date as well.

MS: [Inaudible.]

JE: But that's what I mean is we require it because there's a scientific reason in needing to know. I've heard some people—one of the comments over here was when foot and mouth disease happened, it hit three-quarters of the country before we ever grabbed hold and knew what was going on. I disagree with that. I think it'd be a little bit less. We actually, in Alabama a few years ago, had a pretty big foot and mouth disease scare down at the Port of Mobile that, being from Louisiana, you may or not have been aware about. But basically, as Mr. Blossom pointed out, there's a lot of rented land out there, and if foot and mouth disease had hit the Port of Mobile and it had traveled the 30 or 40 miles airborne and we could not identify whose cattle or what premises were there, we really wouldn't know how far it had spread or how quick it had spread. That being said, USDA—the state animal health officials—were really proactive in this. But there are some arguments on why the premises—

MS: I'm just a dumb, old woman, but I'll put it to you this way: We have a vaccine for hoof and mouth. Why aren't we vaccinating against it if it's so dangerous?

JE: I'm going to state that I'm not an animal health official first off, okay? We haven't had foot and mouth disease in the United States in—if I remember right—since the twenties—'29.

MS: [Inaudible.]

JE: Right, right, right. And here again, I'm not speaking as a university employee or anything else—I'm speaking as a producer. As a producer, it really doesn't bother me to register my premises. As a producer, it hadn't been a problem. I haven't had any problems with it.

MS: We were in the scrapie program—our premise was on record. I didn't have a problem with that. The problem I have is that they're making me do it mandatorily, and it really burns me up.

JE: At this point, though, in the state of Alabama, it's voluntary.

MS: Well, it's voluntary—it's supposed to be everywhere. But still, if it's made mandatory, I'm not doing it. I'm stubborn, I'm old.

MS: [Inaudible.]

MS: That's a lie. Hey, as a Louisianer, old French people down in the swamp, they can't even use a computer. Half of them don't even speak English.

JE: Thanks. Wired in.

MS: Oh yeah, my mouth's such a big one, it don't hurt.

JK: This is John Kisse. What I was referring to on foot and mouth, I think we will have it before we realize we have it, and I know there was a study by one of the universities that said if it was in one of our markets and they found out 24 hours later, it would already be in about 26 states. That's what I was referring to. We will have it before we know it, and it will have spread. And once we have it, it's going to be everywhere. As far as the vaccination and why they haven't done that from some of the meetings I've attended, some countries will not accept meat if it's been vaccinated.

MS: I don't care. Vaccinate.

JK: I'm just answering your question, ma'am.

MS: That's how I feel about it. Genocide is not the answer.

JE: I think some elements—and this is back probably to the seven points—but I think some elements of a disease system are okay. Some elements—the concept of premises registration—has value. If there were some incident right here in Birmingham, it might be nice to know how many cows are within 20 miles of here. And without something like a premises registration system, we wouldn't know that. So for that alone, I think that concept has some value.

MS: Some of them aren't going to do it anyway.

JE: No doubt.

MS: That's ...

JE: Some people don't pay taxes.

MS: That's right. Some people—French people down in the ...

JE: I can't answer that.

MS: It isn't going to happen, I tell you that.

PM: Perry Mobley. I'm with Alabama Farmers Federation. Just responding on the question about HACCP. To echo a little bit about what Josh already mentioned, I was a student at Auburn University about the time that Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points came about. I worked in the Auburn University meat laboratory as a student employee. I can't speak to the reduction in the number of inspectors that might be in a plant—that may or may not be the case—but I would say that the framework behind HACCP has a very strong scientific foundation.

And the good thing about—excuse me—HACCP is the plants are allowed to write their HACCP program. Now, there is some oversight there. They have a set of bounds they have to stay in, but the plant is allowed to write their own HACCP program. And we had a guy that was at Auburn at that time that was a stickler for things like that, and he wrote a HACCP program that we could hardly follow, and it was his own fault—it was our fault for letting it get that big.

But one thing that is really good about critical control points—and we can use that type of framework on our farms—is we can identify where we might have a disease situation, whether it be a disease that we deal with daily, like BVD or IBR or something like that—where those things are most likely to take place. And it's not a bad idea for us to take those things into account and maybe have our own type of plant. And one other point, and this is probably the last thing I'm going to say: There is some validity, absolutely, to a system that gives traceability for disease surveillance purposes, and our organization—and I represent an organization here today, I don't represent myself, and I am a stocker cattle producer.

But our organization and our beef producers that come up with our policy are much in favor of being able to at least mitigate the circumstances of foot and mouth disease outbreak, and I do agree. And I've seen the UC Davis study. Foot and mouth disease has an incubation period of seven to ten days, and by the time we see clinical signs, there's no telling how far it's gone. I don't think we could get our arms around it in any period of time, but the 48 hour deal was a number that sounded good. It was pulled out of there. I've been told that by USDA people and state animal health officials.

So there's very little validity to 48 hours, but there is some validity and scientific foundation to being able to track animals from the standpoint of disease surveillance and mitigating an awful situation that could take place with foot and mouth disease. But I think that USDA would be better off to spend money through CREES or some other facet of USDA to allow our extension personnel—like Josh—and university personnel to educate our producers on the benefits of individual animal identification. Individual animal identification is a great tool as a stocker operator.

If I've got a calf that's sick and I've doctored him—and we're going to have calves that get sick, that's just the way it goes—I need to know which calf I gave the medicine to. And I do use hot brands, but all of my calves have got the same hot brand on. I don't know which one it was—a lot of them look the same. So there are benefits to individual animal ID, there's benefits to a traceback system, but it should not be one that is mandated. It should be one that stakeholders, that everybody that is involved in livestock production—and we say livestock production, but every one of us that produces livestock produce food. We're putting food on somebody's table.

This is not a food safety plan—you can't enhance food safety with an animal ID system—but our consumers place a lot of responsibility on us—and they should—to provide them with a safe and wholesome product, and I think we've done that for ever how long we've been here. But in order to be viable to maintain our herds, there are a lot of diseases out there that could be very detrimental to us, and we need to be able to stop the spread of those diseases in a timely fashion. I think 48 hours is—I don't think that's achievable, but—

MS: Well, if you have a sick animal, you're going to take it to the vet—

MS: I've got one already.

MS: —and if you find it's going to be something that's going to affect everything you have, what you're going to do is you're going to try to take care of the whole bunch. If it's going to affect them all, you're going to try and get them healthy again and you're going to try and quarantine whatever is going to affect something else. But one of my biggest concerns is, like you say with this hoof and mouth, okay. So we're going to do like England did and destroy thousands and thousands and thousands of animals and pour them in a trench—and some of them weren't even sick?

And premise ID isn't going to help that—they didn't even identify those animals. They just went and took a whole farm and killed them and put them in a hole, and they destroyed their agriculture economy ... That's not acceptable to me, and I won't go that route. I'll fight it to the very end.

RB: This is Reid Blossom again. In the interest of establishing a running conversation rather, a lot has been said—a big point—on the animal tracking. The third arm of the current NAIS program is animal tracking, and in the marketing sector and particularly the stockyard side, we've gone in and tried to use this equipment and there are some holes in it. It really doesn't live up to its performance standards that have been established in a trade show vendor hall.

So to address that or from that point, I'd like to hear some different opinions on what we think—in an animal disease surveillance program, what is an acceptable percentage of trackable livestock? I mean, is 90 percent good enough to safeguard us? Because for a consumer, I know that it probably would not sell a lot of beef if I were to say there's a 90 percent chance you will not get sick by buying this pound of ground beef.

I mean, for discussion, what do people think is the standard that we ought to be achieving with a program like this because I don't know that NAIS—I know that there's a 90 percent participation level listed in the PowerPoint, but what's good enough percentile-wise?

MS: Anybody else like to—?

CS: I'd like to backtrack just a second. Sorry about that. I know you're going to hate that. My friend Joel Gill, a member of R-CALF USA—ran for Congress—he went to Honduras on a calf defect finding mission. And in the NAFTA model free trade agreement, it says that slaughterhouses are to have equivalent inspection, okay? He went down there—Dr. Max Thornsberry, our president—they found dust-covered ceilings. They found banned chemicals on the floor. They said the USDA, when they go down

there, give them a two-week notice and only come once a year. And that beef, we ship to a Wendy's in Colorado.

Also, I was on the phone with Dr. James Watson—he's the state Board of Health veterinarian in Mississippi, and me and him were discussing this foot and mouth disease. And I said, "Where is the most likely place for us to get that from?" And he says, "Peru and the Central American countries." And right now, the USDA is trying to carve out sections of the Indian Free Trade Agreement—they're trying to carve out sections of the country so they can speed up importing beef into here, and we've got the Peru Free Trade Agreement.

And to me, it's hard for me to trust and sign that premise ID—somebody brings it to me—when I know that this, right here, is going on. I know it's not the issue at hand, but when I know that kind of stuff's going on—to me, let's find out where the foot and mouth disease is going to come from, and then let's try to address it from that angle for someone. I mean, it's not all on the American producer, and so that's just some of the concerns I have.

And I'd like to read this and us three might can discuss this outside a little bit, but I'd like to read this statement and this is coming from a doctor of veterinary medicine who had a processing plant in Missouri that was shut down by the government. And I have studied him on other issues, but I can't really verify for this. He says, "To address the challenge of increased incidences of tainted meat products, Congress and USDA must substantially reform the current hands-off inspection system, known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point. HACCP has fundamentally failed to ensure adequate sanitary practices at major slaughterhouse establishments.

As a part of HACCP reform, Congress should implement a requirement that meat sold at retail and at food service establishments be traceable back to the slaughterhouse that produced the meat from live animals—not just back to the processor that may have further processed tainted meat. This simple improvement would enable investigators to determine and address the actual source of meat contamination—primarily, the unsanitary conditions that allow enteric origin pathogens, such as E. coli—there's a number—to contaminate otherwise healthful meat." We can go back to his question or whatever you all want to do.

MS: That's just an opinion of HACCP, isn't it?

PM: It's kind of turning into a little bit of a food safety talk here, and I said I wasn't going to say anything else—

MS: We can go back to his—

PM: —but— No. No, I think you bring up a really good point, and I'd like to address that. Perry Mobley, Alabama Farmers Federation. One major concern that we have, as Alabama Farmers Federation, with NAIS is the trend that the current administration has taken the champions of NAIS are selling it now—it's been dead for two years—and they're selling it now as a food safety and national security system. One of the champions of NAIS is also the same individual that sponsored a deal to combine USDA and FDA into a super agency.

In Alabama, we are fortunate to have a congressman that sits on the Livestock Subcommittee of the House Ag Committee, and he was an attorney before he was a congressman. He has serious concerns—and we echo those concerns at the Alabama Farmers Federation—that if NAIS is used to enhance food safety, which it will not do, it's already been stated today that most food safety issues take place at the packing facility, processing facility, restaurant, or at the home at preparation. Mis-preparation, lack of preparation, mishandling, not being fully cooked—those are where food-borne illnesses take place.

You cannot have a food-borne illness take place in a live calf because they still have the hide on them. But if this current administration gets what they want—an NAIS that is capable of tracing animals back to the farm for the purpose of food safety—you are opening the door for nuisance lawsuits all the way back to the farm of origin from consumption to conception. And what we like to call ambulance chasers or trial lawyers would love nothing more than the ability to name every individual that ever touched an animal—

MS: Here, here.

PM: —in a lawsuit. They don't have to win the lawsuit to be effective; they can litigate our producers out of business very easily. Our producers don't have the money to fight these types of nuisance lawsuits. The margin in livestock business is so small, there is no extra money out there to be fighting nuisance lawsuits. And NAIS, as it is proposed, does not adequately address that issue. It is not a food safety issue, and I do know that USDA has stated they want it to be a food safety enhancement program. You cannot enhance food safety with an animal identification program.

MS: That's so true.

PM: You can only enhance the traceability of animal health situations, not food safety.

FS: Very good.

FS: I appreciate your very heartfelt comments and concerns. I think we should be taking a break for lunch—

MS: Amen, sister.

FS: —about now?

MS: I'm hungry. [Inaudible.]

FS: Would most of you like to just conclude at this point, and—

MS: Yeah, I think we beat it to death.

MS: Yeah.

FS: If, after lunch, you all want to reconvene, we certainly can—just let us know. Thank you very much for your time and your energy.

PM: Thank you.

MS: It was a pleasure aggravating you.

MS: You didn't aggravate me.

FS: Thank you.

[Tape Ends]

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