

Referring to the corporate and governmental pushers of the new animal ID law, Texas organic farmer Larry Butler said:

**"They exempted jackasses 'cause they didn't want to put a chip in their own hides."**

## The lunatic National Animal Identification System

# This is the Marx Brothers, bumbling around Animal Farm!

**A FRIEND OF MINE TELLS A STORY** about the political demise in the 1950s of an entrenched Oklahoma state representative, whom we'll call Elmer Goodenuff.

Rep. Goodenuff, who chaired the ag committee, had been in office so long that he'd grown tight with the Capitol crowd, but he had lost touch with the folks back in his rural district. Thus, when some supermarket lobbyists asked him to sponsor a bill requiring that all egg producers be regulated by the state and have to pay an egg-grading fee, he saw no problem with the measure. It was for the public's health, the lobbyists told him.

His constituents, however, did have a problem with it. In those days, many small farmers made their spending money by selling eggs fresh out of their chicken yards—yet here was ol' Elmer hitting them with a bureaucratic rigmarole and a fee that would make their little egg stands more trouble than they were worth. It turns out that the supermarket lobbyists' real agenda had been to get rid of all these bothersome mom-and-pop competitors.

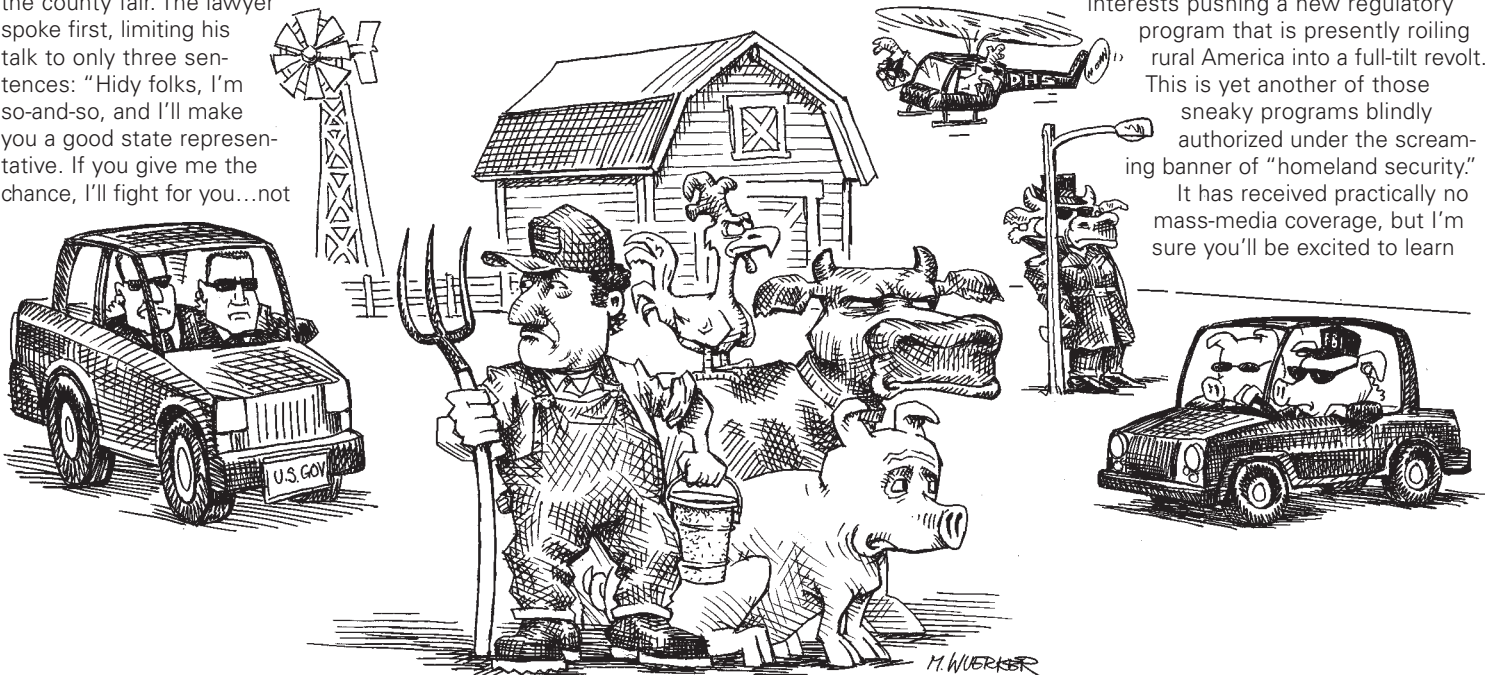
Suddenly, the chairman found himself facing political opposition—a young lawyer from the home district had filed to run against him. Shortly afterward, the two candidates came together for a debate at the county fair. The lawyer spoke first, limiting his talk to only three sentences: "Hidy folks, I'm so-and-so, and I'll make you a good state representative. If you give me the chance, I'll fight for you...not

for the special interests. Now I yield the balance of my time to Mr. Goodenuff, so he can explain his egg bill to you."

Still clueless, Elmer did try to explain it, but his explanation was hardly good enough—the more he talked, the more votes he lost. His egg bill retired him.

### Chicken trackers

I expect that many of today's state legislators and Congress critters—Democrats as well as Republicans—are going to experience their own Goodenuff comeuppance if they continue to go along with special interests pushing a new regulatory program that is presently roiling rural America into a full-tilt revolt. This is yet another of those sneaky programs blindly authorized under the screaming banner of "homeland security." It has received practically no mass-media coverage, but I'm sure you'll be excited to learn



The Bushites are determined to increase corporate power even if it kills them...or you!

Eager to serve the giant trucking firms that have given George big campaign contributions, Bush's acolytes at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration keep trying to jimmy the rules of the road in ways that fatten trucker profits, wear out drivers, and endanger everyone sharing our roads. This is no small issue, for some 100 people die and more than 2,000 are injured every week in crashes involving large trucks.

A major cause of these casualties is truck-driver fatigue. So, Congress directed the trucking regulatory agency to make safety its number-one priority and to revise the rules to decrease crashes caused by fatigue.

In 2003, the Bushites issued their new rules. Astonishingly, the rules increased the length of time a trucking corporation could make its drivers stay behind the wheel, raising the limit from 60 hours a week to 77. That's 11 hours a day!

The watchdog group Public Citizen sued, and in 2004 a federal appeals court struck down this irresponsible rule. In 2005, however, under heavy lobbying from the industry, the agency essentially reissued its old regulation allowing seven consecutive, 11-hour days on the road. Again, Public Citizen sued—and now a second appeals court has overturned that.

The industry says that long hours make it cheaper to move stuff across the country. Yeah—unless you're one of the 5,000 people a year who pay with their lives! Public Citizen: [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org).

that the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) sets up a whole new surveillance program to defend you and yours from a rather odd national security threat: terrorist chickens. And terrorist cows, horses, pigs, sheep, llamas...and so on. Advanced under the benign guise of protecting public health from outbreaks of animal-borne diseases, this program is intended to tag and track every farm animal in America from birth to death.

It is, to say the least, intrusive. *NAIS would compel all owners of such animals to register their premises and personal information in a federal database, to buy microchip devices and attach them to every single one of their animals (each of which gets its very own 15-digit federal ID number), to log and report each and every "event" in the life of each animal, to pay fees for the privilege of having their location and animals registered, and to sit still for fines of up to \$1,000 a day for any noncompliance.*

This is Animal Farm meets the Marx Brothers!

It would be one thing if this were meant for the massive factory farms run by agribusiness conglomerates, which account for the vast number of disease outbreaks. After all, they have corporate staffs, computer networks, and existing systems of inventory tracking. But no—rather than focus on the big boys that cause the big harm, NAIS targets hundreds of thousands of small farms, homesteaders, organic producers, hobbyists...and maybe even you.

Me, you shriek?! Yes. If you keep a pony for your kids or board a couple of riding horses, if you've got a few chickens in your backyard, if you've got a potbellied pig or a pet goose, if your youngsters are raising a half-dozen ducks as part of a 4-H club project, if you maintain a buffalo or a goat just for the fun of

it—indeed, if you have any farm animals, NAIS wants you in its computerized grasp.

Every farm, home, horse stable, or other domicile of these animals would have to have its address and precise GPS coordinates filed into the system's central computer, along with the name, phone number, and other personal data of the owner/renter of the premises. Owners of the animals would have to tag every one of them (luckily, fish ponds are not included!) with an approved tracking mechanism—most likely by implanting radio-frequency ID chips into them.

Then comes the burden of logging and reporting the "events" in each animal's life. These not only include sales and deaths, but also any movement of the animals off the registered premises—including taking them to a vet, going to a horse show, presenting them for judging at the county fair, trucking them to another farm, and participating in a roundup or sporting event.

This is far more onerous than the burden put on owners of guns and autos, the only two items of personal property presently subject to general systems of permanent registration. Gun owners, for example, can take their guns off their premises (to go hunting, attend a gun show, or just carry them around) without filing a report with the government. But NAIS would deny this freedom to chicken owners! The authorities are declaring hens to be more dangerous than a Belgian FN Five-SeveN handgun, and every time hen #8406390528 strays from her assigned GPS locale, NAIS autocrats would require her owner to report *within 24 hours* the location, duration, and purpose of her departure—or be subject to a stiff fine.

### Cui bono?

One would guess that Orwell, Huxley, or Kafka came up with this

absurdity as a work of satire, but unfortunately it's all too real. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) first published a "Draft Strategic Plan" for NAIS in April 2005, setting forth its intention to make the program mandatory by federal law. In June 2006, USDA issued an implementation document setting a goal of having 100% of premises registered and 100% of animals tagged by January 2009. Rep. Collin Peterson, a Minnesota Democrat who chairs the House Agriculture Committee, is pushing NAIS in Congress, and there's also an effort to impose NAIS piecemeal by getting state legislatures to pass it. Already, USDA has spent about \$117 million trying to get NAIS off the ground.

To find out who's driving this, we have to ask the old Latin question, *Cui bono?* (Who benefits?) That takes us to another obscure acronym, NIAA, which stands for the National Institute of Animal Agriculture. Despite its official-sounding name, this is a private consortium largely made up of two groups: proponents of corporate agriculture and hawkers of surveillance technologies. They are the ones who conceived the program, wrote the USDA proposal, and are pushing hard to impose it on us.

Such industrialized meat producers as Cargill and Tyson have three reasons to love NAIS. First, the scheme fits their operations to a T, not only because they are already thoroughly computerized, but also because they engineered a neat corporate loophole: If an entity owns a vertically integrated, birth-to-death factory system with thousands of animals (as the Cargills and Tysons do), it does not have to tag and track each one but instead is given a single lot number to cover the whole flock or herd. Second, it's no accident that NAIS will be so burdensome and costly (fees, tags, computer equipment, time) to small farmers and ranchers. The giant operators are happy to see these pesky competitors saddled with another reason to go out of business, thus leaving even more of the market to the big guys.

Third, the Cargills and Tysons are eager to assure Japan, Europe, and other export customers that the U.S. meat industry is finally doing something to clean up the widespread contamination of its product. A national animal-tracking system would give the appearance of doing this without making the corporations incur the cost of a real cleanup. The health claims of NAIS are a sham,

## DoSomething!

**NAIS backers** assumed they could sneak their little package of nasties past the people before anyone woke up. Wrong.

Here are some of the spunky and savvy groups of grassroots activists who are all over this issue:

- **Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance**  
[www.farmandranchfreedom.org](http://www.farmandranchfreedom.org)  
866-687-6452
- **Liberty Ark Coalition**  
[www.libertyark.net](http://www.libertyark.net)
- **NAIS Sucks**  
[www.naisucks.com](http://www.naisucks.com)
- **No NAIS**  
[www.NoNais.org](http://www.NoNais.org)
- **Organic Consumers Association**  
[www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org)  
218-226-4164
- **Stop Animal ID**  
[www.stopanimalid.org](http://www.stopanimalid.org)
- **Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association**  
[www.tofga.org](http://www.tofga.org)
- **Virginia Independent Consumers and Farmers Association**  
[www.vicfa.net](http://www.vicfa.net)

*One way to help spread the word is to send or hand out copies of this issue of Lowdown to groups, legislators, editors, and others.*

## Scamming the public

**I**N ITS 2005 DOCUMENT that first made the animal ID scheme public, USDA flatly declared on page one, "There is broad support for NAIS among government, industry, and public stakeholders." Hmm... how would the officials know that public "stakeholders" approved the plan when most didn't even know about it?

Well, says USDA, we held NAIS "listening sessions" from June to November of 2004. Really? Yes, boasts the ag agency, adding that 60 people made comments, with 59 applauding the system. *Sixty comments!* That's the public?

But, wait, says USDA—the NIAA agribusiness/computer consortium conducted a survey and found overwhelming support for NAIS, so there. Well sure it found support—since the survey was of its own members! These outfits are the very ones that created this piece of lunacy and stand to profit from it. Indeed, several of the private interests in NIAA have formed the U.S. Animal Identification Organization that is expected to get a massive contract from USDA to manage the even more massive database that the government will assemble for them.

In short, the handful of profiteers behind NAIS listened to themselves, surveyed themselves, and then proclaimed themselves to be the public will. Real public support for NAIS is negligible—and opposition to it is both widespread and white hot. USDA officials know this, which is why they've tried to tiptoe it past the public.

because it does not touch the source of E.coli, salmonella, listeria, mad cow, and other common meat-borne diseases. Such contamination comes from the inherently unhealthy practices (mass crowding, growth stimulants, feeding regimens, rushed assembly lines, poor sanitation, etc.) of industrial-scale meat operations, and NAIS will do nothing to stop these practices. Moreover, tracking ends at the time of slaughter, and it's from slaughter onward that most spoilage occurs. NAIS doesn't trace any contamination after this final "event" in the animals' lives.

Which brings us to the chip companies and sellers of computer tracking systems. In addition to such brand-name players as Microsoft, outfits with names like Viatrace, AgInfoLink, and Digital Angel are drooling over the profits promised

by the compulsory tagging of all farm animals. USDA figures there are more than two million premises in the U.S. with eligible livestock. There are 6 million sheep in our country, 7 million horses, 63 million hogs, 97 million cows, 260 million turkeys, 300 million laying hens, 9 billion chickens, and untold numbers of bison, alpaca, quail, and other animals—all needing to be chipped and monitored. And, as new animals are born, they need chips, too—a self-perpetuating market!

Amalgamated into the NIAA front group, these money interests established a task force in 2002 "to provide leadership in creating an animal identification plan." The group had already been promoting the idea for months, using fears of disease outbreaks and bioterrorism to put a sheen of respectability on

their intentions and to gain endorsements from America's corporate-dominated agriculture establishment. In essence, this small, private group of profit seekers developed a self-serving plan that will affect millions of people and got USDA to adopt it whole, with practically no public participation.

### Revolt!

With the unveiling of its 2005 strategic plan, however, USDA got way more public participation than it wanted. Quicker and hotter than a prairie fire, word of this corporate-driven, bureaucratic monstrosity spread throughout the countryside, and NAIS instantaneously became the most hated initiative in rural America. Meetings were held, rallies were organized, research was done, websites sprang up, blogs raged, Paul Reveres rode, groups formed, lawyers leapt into action—and the rebellion was on!

Stunned, the establishment took a step back. The 2005 plan said NAIS was mandatory, but in November 2006 USDA rushed out a revision declaring NAIS would be voluntary and that the feds would let states take the lead in implementing the system.

Wary farm activists, however, noted a qualifier in USDA's declaration. NAIS was to be "a voluntary program at the federal level." Activists were right to be on guard, for the ag establishment has been going all out to make the program mandatory at the state level, pushing state legislatures to require participation. Indiana, Kentucky, and Wisconsin have already made registration compulsory, and efforts are underway to do so in Maine, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington.

Even without legislation, states are being encouraged by USDA to use coercive measures to enroll

## DEMOCRATS CAVE IN TO BUSH FEARMONGERING

Once upon a time, America had a strong president who reassured the American people, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Now we have a weak president who tells us that we must be fearful of all things all the time. He even color codes fear for us, most often flame hot. This summer, he used the scorching rhetoric of fear to cow congressional Democrats, scaring them into rubber-stamping a blatant subversion of our constitutional liberties.

Democrats rushed through a law letting the White House eavesdrop on your and my phone calls and emails without bothering to get search warrants. They went along with the Bushites' demand that the attorney general be allowed to order that any of our international calls or electronic messages be monitored if he decides on his own that we might be communicating with someone who might be outside the U.S. who might or might not have even vague connections to some terrorist group.

Yes, Alberto "See No Evil" Gonzales can click into entire telecommunications networks to intercept millions of innocent messages without having to show probable cause of illegal activity.

Congress ceded this extraordinary reach to the executive even though there's already a quick-responding court enabled to authorize surveillance of what it decides are legitimate terrorist suspects.

It's arrogant nonsense for the Bushites to assert that they're above the law—but it's shameful cowardice for scaredy-cat Democratic leadership to go along with them.

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It's embarrassing that George W keeps trying to deceive the American public about developments in Iraq, but it's shameful that the media establishment blithely goes along, parroting Bush's deceit.

Take Bush's high-pressure push to ram his new oil law through the Iraqi Parliament. The official line is that this is a healing measure that would provide for a fair distribution of oil profits among Iraq's Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds—and its passage is the number-one non military benchmark that the White House has set to measure Iraqi "progress."

Major media outlets in our country have swallowed Bush's line whole, frequently and unquestioningly reporting that, for some reason, those quarrelsome Iraqis can't even agree on something as basic as sharing oil revenues. There have been several impatient editorials demanding that Baghdad get on with it.

Truth is, this is not about sharing profits, but about a cynical power grab by multinational oil giants. Big Oil got the Bushites to write a provision into the proposed law that would open two thirds of Iraq's oil fields to ownership by foreign corporations—unlike Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Iran which all control their oil drilling and extraction.

In short, the law would force Iraq to surrender sovereignty over its most valuable economic resource—and that's why it is not passing. One thing the nation's politicians all can see is just how vehement public opposition to Big Oil's law is.

So when you see stories about Bush, Cheney and others imploring Iraq's Parliament to pass this law—remember, they're not promoting national reconciliation, they're promoting a shameful oil scam.

farms and ranches in NAIS. One way is to make people's participation in various popular government programs (disease management, conservation, etc.) contingent upon registering their premises in the federal NAIS database. Some people are even being told they can't take animals to shows or have their kids join 4-H unless they register.

Another technique is even more crude—enroll people without their knowledge. This is done by mining data from other agencies and merging it into NAIS computers. In an agency report last year, Massachusetts' agriculture commissioner bragged, "We've had great success in integrating the records of municipal animal inspectors into a database for premise registration. While you may not know your premise ID number yet, if you were visited by your animal inspector, you should be in our database." (This is the same guy, by the way, who says it's time to require chickens to be raised indoors. "Tolerance for outdoor poultry will become zero," he proclaimed.)

Once registered in NAIS (voluntarily or surreptitiously), you're pretty much stuck there. Until April, there was no procedure at all to opt out of the system, and the one they offer now leaves it up to USDA—not you—as to whether you can get your name, premise, and animals out of the database. As USDA puts it, a request for removal must be submitted to your state's top NAIS official, "who'll decide whether to authorize the request." So much for "voluntary."

What USDA can't get by coercion or subterfuge, it's trying to get with cash. Our cash. So far, it has laid out \$6 million in grants (some dare call them payoffs) to livestock-industry organizations and others

to front for NAIS by hyping it and running sign-up campaigns. In June, for example, the Future Farmers of America youth group was given \$600,000 to entice its 7,200 local chapters into promoting premise registration in classrooms and at FFA events—with awards offered to chapters that do the best.

**Fighting back**

Despite its underhanded tactics, its war chest filled with our tax dollars, and its deceitful rationales, the ag establishment still hasn't been able to hang NAIS around our necks. As one farmer put it, "This thing's so stinky, I wouldn't pull it behind my tractor with forty feet of rope." Like Bush's Social Security privatization scheme, this proposal profits too few at the expense of too many, and the more people learn about it, the less popular it will be.

While the media barons have mostly missed (or ignored) this story, grassroots forces—especially small farmers—have done a phenomenal job of spreading information, rallying opposition, confronting politicians who've been going along with such a gross intrusion into our freedoms—and winning converts.

For example, in Wisconsin, which was the first state to require farmers to register their premises in NAIS's database, the sponsor of the bill now opposes the program. Rep. Barbara Gronemus, a Democrat from a rural district, says she was duped. Appalled by the way it's being implemented and by the financial squeeze it puts on family farmers, she says, "I could just kick myself for putting my name to it now."

In at least 11 states, legislation has been introduced to reject the program, and in Texas and Vermont,

aggressive grassroots opposition has forced legislators to back off plans to mandate premise registration. I also know some urban Democrats in Congress who had been supporting NAIS on the assumption that it was a consumer-protection program. They've since had "visits" from agitated home-folks who helped them see the light. Such visits are producing results. This summer, the House Appropriations Committee pointedly refused to approve any new funds for NAIS, instead demanding "a complete and detailed strategic plan for the program, including tangible outcomes..." Incredibly, NAIS has gone as far as it has without ever having been subjected to a cost-benefit analysis! At last, the committee has now declared that without being shown some real benefits of such a sweeping ID system, it "has no justification to continue funding the program."

This is a big change in congressional attitude. However, billions of dollars are at stake in getting NAIS implemented, and the profiteers form a powerful lobby that will keep pushing at all levels, by all means. To hold them off requires more of us to learn what they're up to and to join the grassroots rebellion against them.

You might not own a chicken or a cow, but you do own some fundamental freedoms that NAIS subverts in its pell-mell pursuit of special-interest profits. Some good people are standing up for those freedoms—check the "Do Something" box to find out what you can do to help.

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