

May 29, 2006 The House of Representatives recently passed funding for a new federal mandate that threatens to put thousands of small farmers and ranchers out of business. The National Animal Identification System, known as NAIS, is an expensive and unnecessary federal program that requires owners of livestock-- cattle, dairy, poultry, and even horses-- to tag animals with electronic tracking devices. The intrusive monitoring system amounts to nothing more than a tax on livestock owners, allowing the federal government access to detailed information about their private property. In typical Washington-speak, NAIS is "voluntary"—provided USDA bureaucrats are satisfied with the level of cooperation. Trust me, NAIS will be mandatory within a few years. When was the last time a new federal program did not expand once implemented? As usual, Congress is spending millions of dollars creating a complex non-solution to a very simple problem. NAIS will cost taxpayers at least \$33 million for starters. Agribusiness giants support NAIS, because they want the federal government to create a livestock database and provide free industry data. But small and independent livestock owners face a costly mandate if NAIS becomes law. Larger livestock operations will be able to tag whole groups of animals with one ID device. Smaller ranchers and farmers, however, will be forced to tag each individual animal, at a cost of anywhere from \$3 to \$20 per head. And NAIS applies to anyone with a single horse, pig, chicken, or goat in the backyard—no exceptions. NAIS applies to children in 4-H or FFA. Once NAIS becomes mandatory, any failure to report and tag an animal subjects the owner to \$1,000 per day fines. NAIS also forces livestock owners to comply with new paperwork and monitoring regulations. These farmers and ranchers literally will be paying for an assault on their property and privacy rights, as NAIS empowers federal agents to enter and seize property without a warrant-- a blatant violation of the 4th amendment. NAIS is not about preventing mad cow or other diseases. States already have animal identification systems in place, and virtually all stockyards issue health certificates. Since most contamination happens after animals have been sold, tracing them back to the farm or ranch that sold them won't help find the sources of disease. More than anything, NAIS places our family farmers and ranchers at an economic disadvantage against agribusiness and overseas competition. As dairy farmer and rancher Bob Parker stated, NAIS is "too intrusive, too costly, and will be devastating to small farmers and ranchers."

NAIS means more government, more regulations, more fees, more federal spending, less privacy, and diminished property rights. It's exactly the kind of federal program every conservative, civil libertarian, animal lover, businessman, farmer, and rancher should oppose. The House has already acted, but there's still time to tell the Senate to dump NAIS. Please call your Senators and tell them you oppose spending even one dime on the NAIS program in the 2007 agriculture appropriations bill.