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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture
Room 1301, Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6001

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July 20, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 200A Whitten Building
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing today as Members of the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture to request that you implement a private sector-based animal identification system.

Each time our nation or trading partners experience an animal health problem of any kind, considerable attention is focused on our lack of a comprehensive animal identification system. While we understand that such a system does not prevent or control a disease in and of itself, it does have the potential to provide the livestock community and regulatory agencies significant tools for monitoring and managing the herd. This, in turn, has long term benefits for our nation's animal health status and international competitiveness.

On December 30, 2003, the Secretary of Agriculture announced that USDA will begin immediate implementation of a verifiable system of national animal identification. On May 6, 2005, USDA published for comment its Animal Identification Strategic Plan which envisions full implementation of an ID system years in the future. During this entire period, there has been a disappointing lack of consideration of a private sector-based approach to the animal identification challenge. This is unfortunate because experience suggests that private-based systems have allowed other nations to implement ID systems swiftly and inexpensively while still maximizing the benefit to producers and the utility for government regulators.

Examples include Canada, which has a private entity directed by an industry-dominated board and using Federal authority and oversight. The Australian system, which is run by a producer-owned company in close cooperation with States and the Federal government, is another interesting contrast to the USDA approach. Finally, there is Switzerland, where the government simply contracted out the entire function to the private sector.

As far as we know, there has been no analysis within the Department about these systems and how we might apply them here. Since other nations' have been able to implement private sector-based systems – in partnership with government – which display qualities of thrift, flexibility and expediency, we are disappointed that such a solution is not being pursued in the United States.

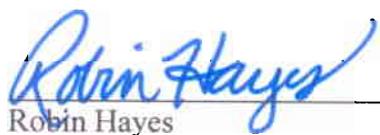
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We think private animal ID systems will speed the process of implementing a national ID program and will enhance U.S. markets and add value to U.S. livestock.

We urge you to compare the track record thus far of USDA's government-only approach with that of nations that have successfully harnessed the innovation, resourcefulness and economy of the private sector. We believe you will come to the same conclusion we have and lend your support to such a solution to the animal identification challenge.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you on this, as well as other, issues important to the livestock production community.

Sincerely,



Robin Hayes



Randy Neugebauer



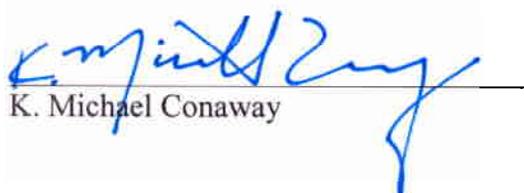
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