



## Vilsack calls for new 'framework' on animal identification

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Washington, Feb. 5. For all of you who thought that mandatory national animal identification system was inevitable, well, it's time to think again. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced this morning that, after a year of USDA listening sessions, he plans yet another meeting to "initiate a dialogue about the possible ways of achieving the flexible, coordinated approach to animal disease traceability we envision."

"The new focus will be solely on tracing disease...for the sake of the animals and the sake of the markets," said Vilsack. "The new approach should be federal supported, but not federally led." Vilsack said USDA should provide financial resources and technical assistance to the states and state officials should control all of the data.

The framework, announced today at the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Mid-Year meeting, provides the basic tenets of an improved animal disease traceability capability in the U.S, according to the Department's release. USDA's efforts will:

- Only apply to animals moved in interstate commerce;
- Be administered by the States and Tribal Nations to provide more flexibility;
- Encourage the use of lower-cost technology; and
- Be implemented transparently through federal regulations and the full rulemaking process.

USDA sources told *Agri-Pulse* that, after the next round of dialogue and what will likely be another round of rulemaking, it could be a minimum of two years, and likely longer, before any type of new plan is in place.

"One of my main goals for this new approach is to build a collaborative process for shaping and implementing our framework for animal disease traceability," said Vilsack. "We are committed to working in partnership with States, Tribal Nations and industry in the coming months to address many of the details of this framework, and giving ample opportunity for farmers and ranchers and the public to provide us with continued input through this process."

Vilsack said he is looking for input from the states with how to deal with questions related to liability.

Vilsack's announcement comes more than six years after former Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman responded to the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in Washington State by setting in motion plans for a mandatory animal tracing system. As beef prices plummeted, consumers, trading partners and some animal industry advocates argued that the U.S. needed a national system to trace animals back to individual farms, such as the one Canada already adopted.

Both Secretary Mike Johanns and Secretary Ed Schafer continued to push forward with various plans for a national animal identification system. But facing industry pressure from a diverse group of cattlemen and several small and organic producers, neither Secretary implemented a mandatory plan designed to protect the food supply and animal health. Facing similar opposition, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack seems to be following in their footsteps.

"After concluding our listening tour on the National Animal Identification System in 15 cities across the country, receiving thousands of comments from the public and input from States, Tribal Nations, industry groups, and representatives for small and organic farmers, it is apparent that a new strategy for animal disease traceability is needed," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "I've decided to revise the prior policy and offer a new approach to animal disease traceability with changes that respond directly to the feedback we heard."

Vilsack said one of USDA's first steps will be to convene a forum with animal health leaders for the States and Tribal Nations to initiate a dialogue about the path forward. USDA will also be revamping the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health to address specific issues, such as confidentiality and liability.

The Department will also be taking additional actions to further strengthen protections against the entry and spread of disease, Vilsack said. These steps will include actions to lessen the risk from disease introduction, initiating and updating analyses on how animal diseases travel into the country, improving response capabilities, and focusing on greater collaboration and analyses with States and industry on potential disease risk overall.

More information on USDA's new direction on animal traceability and the steps to improve disease prevention and control is available at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability>.

For more information and industry reaction to this announcement, go to: [www.Agri-Pulse.com](http://www.Agri-Pulse.com)