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## ONLINE NEWS

### Animal Identification Group Deactivates

by: *Pat Raia*

March 06 2007 Article # 9020

A nonprofit organization established to compile a national identification database for livestock, including horses, was rendered "inactive" in January--just one year after its founding--because it was ahead of its time, said a spokesperson for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. The organization sought to build a nationwide registry of horses to help state and federal agencies locate horses in the event of equine disease outbreaks or natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

"The U.S. Animal Identification Organization (USAIO), was established in January 2006," said Karen Batra, director of public relations for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a group that helped establish USAIO. "But the main focus of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Identification System (NAIS) became premises identification. USAIO focus on animal identification may have been premature."

But lack of funding and producer participation played a role in its suspension as well. According to Batra, USAIO was a producer-driven effort to collect and maintain voluntarily submitted livestock data from producers including horse breeders. Board members were drawn from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the American Farm Bureau, and bison producers. Data and funding came from the Kentucky-based Southeast Livestock Network and the Northwest Pilot Project, organizations already collecting animal identification registrations in their regions.

Over time, additional funding sources proved scarce. USAIO received no USDA funding, and individual livestock organizations did not sign on to the national animal registration concept. The USAIO became inactive, Batra said, when further producer support failed to emerge.

According to Tim Turney of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, that's partly because the USAIO had no definite funding mechanism when its representatives met

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with members of Kentucky's horse industry.

"I was at that meeting, and there was interest," Turney said. "The idea was that people who provided registrations into the database would pay a fee to do it. But USAIO was unclear about how that payment would be made--at the time of registry or at the time the horse was moved or at some other time."

Horse owners in most states can voluntarily register the address of where their horses are kept with the Department of Agriculture, Turney said. Additionally, Indiana and Wisconsin have adopted legislation for mandatory premises identification registration.

Horse owners in some states, including Kentucky, are required to have health certificates when they travel in-state to sales, shows and trail rides. According to Turney, the certificates attest to horses' health at the time of veterinary examination, and are intended to allow the KDA to identify horses in the event of a significant disease outbreak.



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