

Premises Identification: Whose land is it, anyway?

No. 25 in a series of articles about the NAIS and related topics

By Bruno Schmidt

© 2007 by Schmidt Publications, All Rights Reserved

In this day and age, everyday life would be pretty tedious without relying on “organizing principles” such as a clocks, calendars, phone books, ZIP codes, area codes, and account numbers, to name a few. The upshot is that we have become utterly dependent on and engage in various numbering systems, and enjoy their benefits, without giving it much thought.

While many of these numbering systems are in the public domain and their usage is clearly voluntary, some are controlled by our government and are provided as a service (or benefit) to the public. Just imagine what check processing would come to without those tell-all “routing codes” imprinted at the bottom of every check. Because these codes serve a PUBLIC PURPOSE (banking), it is unlawful to tinker with this numbering system. What is easily being overlooked, however, is the fact that such numbering systems could be used for “other purposes” (without your knowing about it) such as profiling, surveillance, or data mining.

Sometimes, this intent is clearly expressed up front. For example, when Congress in the past introduced bills that sought to authorize the “National Animal Identification System” (for example H.R.3691 on 3-11-2004; S.2070 on 2-12-2004; H.R.1254 on 3-10-2005, among others), all these bills stated “... and for other purposes.” Though these bills never became law, the USDA went ahead with the development of the NAIS, and made its 1st phase – Premises Registration – operational in June, 2005. This Federal system (operated by USDA/APHIS under DHS supervision) assigns unique Federal premises identification numbers to land, numbers that are being used to index the information collected about the land, its location, usage, type of operation, and ownership, and therefore might serve as “organizing principle”. Although its alleged benefits (to control and eradicate animal diseases) are being promoted heavily under the NAIS logo, this system does not contain ANY information about animal health. Therefore, it appears that premises registration and identification could suit “other purposes”.

What might some of those “other purposes” be that use the Federal “Premises Identification Number”, and its attendant information stored in the Federal premises registration system?

- This last Winter, Colorado tapped into this information to locate blizzard-bound, isolated groups of cattle and to air-drop feed to them.

- In Wisconsin, no person may keep (!) a barnyard animal anywhere UNLESS that property has first been registered with the state AND assigned that Federal premises identification number (called “Premises Code” in Wisconsin).
- Moreover, applying for that number has also been made a condition of Wisconsin’s farm and market licensing procedures: no number – no license – no livelihood.

While some of these uses are justifiable (such as the blizzard emergency in Colorado), this does show that government intends to tap into this information even without an animal disease at issue, the very argument that is used to justify the NAIS to the public. Because none of the foregoing uses were ever contemplated in any of the NAIS draft documents, are there any other purposes this number might be used for? During a recent reading of Congress’ forthcoming “2007 Farm Bill”, I came across a summary of the “House Concurrent Resolution 25”, which has coined a rather telling, new term: “Working Land”. I quote (emphasis added):

“The official title of the resolution [H. Con. Res. 25] as introduced is: “Expressing the sense of Congress that it is the goal of the United States that, not later than January 1, 2025, the agricultural, forestry, and working land of the United States should provide from renewable resources not less than 25 percent of the total energy consumed in the United States and continue to produce safe, abundant, and affordable food, feed, and fiber.”

What, exactly, is the “land” mentioned in this resolution? While the meaning of “agricultural” and “forestry” land is quite clear – crop land and timbered property, respectively – what is this “WORKING LAND” Congress refers to? Certainly not golf courses, strip malls, or parking lots ... As it turns out, this resolution is part and parcel of the forthcoming 2007 Farm Bill (see <http://agriculture.house.gov/inside/legislation.html>) which was extensively discussed at the “3rd Annual Renewable Energy Summit”, March 20-22, 2007, in Washington, D.C. The key to understanding what Congress means by this “working land” can be found in the numerous papers and materials posted on <http://www.25x25.org>, a web site that goes to great length explaining to its visitors “WHY 25X’25 IS GOOD FOR YOU”. On its “Agriculture and Forestry” page, the site’s sponsors tell us what “working land” is all about, and I quote (emphasis added):

“American’s farms, ranches and forests - our working lands - are well positioned to make significant contributions to the development and implementation of new energy solutions. Long known and respected for

their contributions to providing the nation's food and fiber, an emerging opportunity exists for crop, livestock and grass and horticultural producers, as well as forest land owners, to become major producers of another essential commodity - energy."

There you have it: the "working land" of the United States is in fact what we commonly refer to as our privately owned and operated farms, ranches and forests – it is YOUR LAND. Except for private treaty obligations or local laws governing real property, your land is beholden to nobody else. In light of the above resolution, is that about to change, though, especially in those situations where the land was "voluntarily" registered with and identified by the United States government?

Do you agree with and support Congress' missive that the working land of the United States (which includes YOUR land) "... should provide from renewable resources not less than 25 percent of the total energy consumed in the United States [by the year 2025] ..." without having studied the facts and understanding the consequences or effects this may have on YOUR land? Did you have a chance at all to express your thoughts on the proclamation that "...our working lands are well positioned to make significant contributions to the development and implementation of new energy solutions ...". Are YOU ready to make such significant contributions? Or are there some other questions that need to be asked and answered, questions such as:

- Who sets the priorities, and quotas, over food, feed, fiber and fuel production?
- How much of the above production will be allocated to the total 625,000 sq. miles of U.S. crop land; how much to forest land; how much to range land?
- Will farmers' and property owners' participation be voluntary or mandatory?
- Is the goal of "25x'25" even realistic in light of Americans' ever-increasing demands for energy, and what is the source of the remaining 75% that needs to be produced?
- What are the long-term consequences of transgenic crops (i.e. ethanol-corn and biodiesel-soy) on the working land, soil conditions, conventional and organic crops?

The lead agency in charge of achieving Congress' goal of "25x'25" is the USDA, the very agency that has spent in excess of \$84 Million over the past 3 years developing the "voluntary-at-the-Federal-level" NAIS, the very agency that is presently spending in excess of \$22 Million (FY 2007) to complete its aggressive, pull-out-all-stops "premises registration" campaign by 2009. Could it be that the NAIS has become merely incidental to this registration campaign,

that the stakes are in fact much bigger? Because when it comes to Americans' unbridled demand for energy, the stakes involved are enormous, stakes which make the NAIS look like a mere sideshow. At the above Renewable Energy Summit, Thomas C. Dorr, USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development, announced a number of lucrative incentives that are included in the 2007 Farm Bill, such as:

- \$2.1 billion in proposed loan guarantees for renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, with cellulosic ethanol clearly prioritized;
- \$100 million bioenergy program through [loans by] the CCC [Commodity Credit Corporation] for cellulosic producers.
- \$500 million over 10 years to help farmers and rural businesses invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.
- \$150 million over 10 years for the Biomass Research and Development program;
- \$150 million for Forest Service research on woody biomass;
- \$500 million for a new Bioenergy and Bioproducts Research Initiative, a proposed joint venture between USDA and the nation's academic research community.

With the promise of \$3.5 Billion in Federal funds, and in light of the operative principle involved here – seeking to conscript (press into service) America's working land to mitigate Americans' dependence on energy imports – it should not come as a surprise to you that the very agency that is put in charge of that mission is also the agency that wants your "voluntary" participation by way of registering your land, thereby obtaining your perpetual, advanced consent into whatever laws, regulations, executive orders or Federal policies the agency may enforce in the future.

The fact that the USDA's Premises Identification Number is not being exploited (yet) at the Federal level does not diminish the more important question as to whether or not this very "organizing principle" has been put in place precisely in anticipation of programs such as "25x'25", programs that may need to be carried out – or dictated, as the case may be – on a massive, nation-wide scale in the near future.

<><><><>

Bruno & Charlene Schmidt are co-authors of the self-published "Farmer's Field Guide to the NAIS".

Since December 2003, they have spent in excess of 2000 hours researching the National Animal Identification System including applicable laws, regulations and rules. For more information and latest updates, please visit

www.FarmersFieldGuide.com

<><><><>