

Premises Registration: USDA Pulls Out All Stops

No. 27 in a series of articles about the NAIS and related topics

By Bruno Schmidt

© 2007 by Schmidt Publications, All Rights Reserved

In Chapter 8 of the “NAIS How-to Handbook” (published on Feb. 28, 2007), the USDA has disclosed its core strategy for “voluntary” premises registration:

“This chapter is designed to help you identify and leverage partners that are best suited to complement your State’s NAIS campaign. Maybe it’s your local Cattlemen’s Beef Association or another trade group. Maybe it’s area students involved in 4-H or FFA. Or maybe it’s any number of other individuals or groups that interact frequently with livestock and poultry producers.”

From this quote we can glean two things: (1) that the Federal premises registration “campaign” has clearly been moved from the Federal down to the state / tribal level, and (2) that the preferred strategy is to “*identify and leverage partners that are best suited to complement your State’s NAIS campaign*”. LEVERAGE PARTNERS? What kind of partnerships might these be? First, let us look at the Federal level.

Following the USDA’s February offer of awarding an additional \$6 Million in Federal grants to qualifying national, non-profit type organizations, the USDA has substantially bolstered its portfolio of national-level partnerships hoping to boost premises registrations:

- March 7, 2007: the Agency partnered with the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) which had passed a resolution calling on packers to require premises ID numbers as a condition of sale, and calling on breed registries to require premises ID numbers as part of the registration process.
- July 17, 2007: the Agency partnered with the U.S. Animal Identification Organization (USAIO) to conduct a comprehensive outreach program for the purpose of significantly increasing premises registration nationwide.
- August 2, 2007: the Agency partnered with the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), and the *iDairy Consortium* of dairy cattle associations, to facilitate the registration of dairy farm, dairy calf and heifer grower premises, and to conduct an outreach program that will include individual contacts and on-site visits.
- August 9, 2007: the Agency partnered with the American Angus Association, and awarded \$580,000 in cooperative funding, to communicate with its 34,000 members with an expected return of 15,000 additional premises being registered.

In light of this seemingly unstoppable wave of support for the NAIS, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the foregoing so-called “partnerships” have been bought and paid for with Federal grant money, that these very organizations have entered into a performance-based contract (a.k.a. “Cooperative Agreement” or “Memorandum of Understanding”) and therefore have to perform – as any typical contractor would have to – for the Federal government. Because they are contractually bound to perform for the USDA, can these organizations still fairly represent every one of their members, or constituents? The above examples demonstrate the kind of “leverage” at work: the organizations have agreed, in exchange for Federal funds, to leverage their members’ trust in the organization, and its leadership, to entice them into the NAIS and register their premises.

There’s one more “partnership” I have not mentioned yet: on June 4, 2007, the USDA partnered with the National FFA Organization, and awarded \$600,000 in cooperative funding, to promote the value of

premises registration to its 495,046 student members in 7,242 local chapters across all 50 states. In exchange for receiving these cooperative funds, FFA has committed to developing a multi-part program consisting of classroom instructional materials, state-specific registration materials, community outreach kits to host workshops with community groups, content for FFA's *Horizons* magazine and FFA's monthly television show on RFD-TV, and a recognition and award program to acknowledge successful participants.

Clearly, in this "partnership", it is FFA's far-reaching influence and clout with its student members and chapter leaders that is being leveraged to "motivate" their parents, families, friends and peers to register their premises with the NAIS. What I find so appalling about USDA's arrangement with the National FFA Organization is their target: high-school age students, going through a rather competitive and formative period in their lives, are being leveraged and possibly pressured or shamed into promoting and supporting a goal (registering premises with the NAIS) that is entirely outside their educational curriculum.

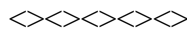
The foregoing arrangement is not the only strategy that seeks to exploit the Youth. The USDA has also implemented this year a "University Extension Program", an educational outreach program that seeks to promote the NAIS at the college level (primarily targeting universities that teach agriculture and/or veterinary medicine, such as California's UC Davis or Washington State University). Here is a quote from a recently obtained "Extension Case Study" published by the USDA featuring WSU Extension's involvement with the NAIS:

"Washington State University (WSU) Extension approached USDA for State funding to engage small producers and address their concerns about NAIS. Since small producers are often involved in 4-H through their children, the organization was identified as an effective channel to reach this segment and garner their support." (Emphasis added)

In this case study, WSU Extension has outlined several key strategies. "4-H will be used to educate small producers about the NAIS" ... "5-10 minute segments on the NAIS will be embedded into 4-H programs" ... "Direct mailings will be sent to youth families and project-animal producers for awareness" ... and "4-H programs [will] convey animal-health and small producer benefits of the NAIS". Moreover, WSU Extension claims that:

"Held in the evenings and on weekends, WSU Extension's 4-H Education programs attract a significant number of adults, including parents, leaders and project-animal producers – an impressive turnout considering the program's focus on youth. ... From a statewide perspective, WSU Extension's 4-H outreach is often cited as one of the most effective ways to increase premises registration among small producers." (Emphasis added)

I find it deeply disturbing to see that long-established, educational Youth programs such as 4-H and FFA (including the students, parents and leaders involved) are being exploited by our Federal and State governments to boost premises registration. Would these Youth organizations go out of their way seeking to register premises without those cooperative funds being offered? How about those national organizations I mentioned earlier: would they partner with the USDA without getting a penny in return?



*Bruno & Charlene Schmidt are co-authors of the self-published "Farmer's Field Guide to the NAIS".
For more information and latest updates, please visit www.FarmersFieldGuide.com*

