



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Review of the National Animal Identification System”

May 5, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity and Science and Technology Subcommittee joint hearing with the Committee on Agriculture’s Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, Poultry entitled “Review of the National Animal Identification System”:

“While we know that the most recent H1N1 incidents are in no way linked to the U.S. animal agriculture, the emergence of new viruses further demonstrates our need to not only be prepared to react to disease outbreaks, but to also undertake the necessary mitigation and research efforts that allow us to stay one step ahead.

We are fortunate to have the luxury of this hearing before something bad happens rather than examining this issue as a kneejerk overreaction that could lead to bad biosecurity policy.

I am pleased we were able to bring the two Committees together to look at this issue appropriately as not only one of animal agriculture, but also one of homeland security. Our supply of animal agriculture is an attractive target to folks who want to do harm to the U.S. As the various professional animal industry groups get caught up in fighting over whether animal ID should be voluntary or mandatory, we must not lose sight of the fact that animal identification is a part of U.S. biosecurity. Animal identification is the first step in being able to trace animals and respond to animal health emergencies.

I have confidence that USDA is well-positioned to manage animal health and the national animal identification system, but I am not satisfied with the pace at which the National Animal Identification System has come along. Absent greater levels of participation, the effectiveness of a national animal ID system is compromised. USDA and DHS must ensure that the missions of food safety and food security are achieved. That way, we will be able to mitigate the consequences associated with such a catastrophe and coordinate Federal assets to prepare for and respond to the incident.

Our two panels can offer great insight. I want to know whether our current mitigation and coordination mechanisms will be sufficient. I am also interested in learning what they believe should be done to increase participation in the national animal ID system.”

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978