



## USDA CALLS FOR EQUINE ORGANIZATIONS TO IMPLEMENT RADIO FREQUENCY IDENTIFICATION BY JANUARY 2009

By Karin Bergener and Judith McGeary

From the beginning, various species groups and breed associations have supported the National Animal Identification System, or NAIS. That support has been evident in lobbying efforts and through the associations' public statements promoting the benefits of NAIS, even though absolutely no evidence has been provided of these alleged benefits. Now, the associations' support for NAIS may be entering a new

phase. In its most recent Business Plan, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) stated that it plans to use breed associations to implement NAIS, listing horse, cattle, sheep, and goat registries as potential targets. As horse owners have questioned their breed associations about the future, new controversy has erupted.

**What is NAIS?** NAIS would require anyone who owns or manages property

with even one horse or other livestock animal to register their home in a state and federal database. Next, each animal would be assigned an internationally unique 15-digit number and tagged. For horses, the tag would be an implanted microchip. The last step would be to track the animals' movements, particularly any movements that involve "commingling" with other livestock. Here in Texas, the state agency has the

authority to make the program mandatory at any time, but so far has not.

**What Is the Government's Plan for our Registries?** The USDA's Business Plan sets several aggressive targets for implementing NAIS, and lists seven "strategies" to achieve those targets. One strategy is "harmonization" of existing systems that already use individual identification. Harmonization involves chang-

ing the existing programs so they use the NAIS-compliant Animal Identification Numbers (AIN's). (USDA Business Plan to Advance Animal Disease Traceability, Dec. 12, 2007, pp.28-29). For instance, the system that records Coggins tests would be "harmonized" so that the farm is identified with a premises identification number (a "PIN") and the animal with a NAIS AIN. You can download the USDA's documents, includ-

ing the Business Plan, at [www.farmandranchfreedom.org/content/Government-documents](http://www.farmandranchfreedom.org/content/Government-documents).

As part of its harmonization strategy, USDA proposes having breed registries begin using AINs. (Plan, p.55). The AIN is a 15-digit internationally unique identification number. It starts with "840" which identifies the animal as coming from the US. (Plan,

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## HORSES, DOGS, CATTLE AND COWBOYS: WORKING COWBOYS IN SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS

Article by Don Ford, Pictures by Leah Ford



Pursuit of my chosen profession was interrupted by poison of my own making some twenty years ago. Once I got back on track I ever-so-gradually inched back toward the career I'd pursued since childhood—raising cattle and managing a ranch. In 1991 I acquired another horse, not long afterward one horse turned into a herd. My father put me back into the cattle business in 2004 when he bought 130 heifers and then shipped 27 cows and a bull back to Texas from a small farm he owns in New Mexico.

Getting the cattle branded and vaccinated was my first challenge. Dad's Belmont,

Texas ranch borders the Guadalupe River, notorious in recent times for floods that can carry herds away. Without a brand, it's hard to know where animals belong after such an occurrence. I borrowed a portable squeeze chute and assembled a group of Mexicans that helped out on our horse farm near Seguin. Most of them had little or no experience with cattle. We had fed range cubes for a couple of weeks so I figured it'd be easy enough to catch the cows. I figured wrong.

I dispatched one fellow in a pickup to call the cattle while the rest of our motley crew circled the herd on foot. A group of cows ran

after the pickup while others lagged behind; every time a few head caught up to the truck he'd go faster—too fast. Me and another fellow pushed the cattle from behind and I tried to convince a couple more of my "helpers" to guard the left flank. A fence formed a barrier on the right. I saw that the herd was getting strung out and also that a few of the New Mexico cows had figured out we had something in mind aside from feeding them. I waved and yelled at one of the men on the left, telling him them to move along. He continued walking. I yelled louder and waved more aggressively but he continued to walk, faster now, but still



at a walk. Seeing the coming break I ran on foot for all I was worth up the left flank, which isn't much at my age, screaming and cussing all the while. I passed the Mexican, but not the cows, which broke and ran

ahead and got around me. The Mexican man began running after the fact, which saved his life but did nothing to help get cattle into the pen.

The rest is a sad and miserable tale: a two-day fiasco that left fences broken, cows branded anywhere from mid-rib to the neck on the right side

of their bodies. Some of the resulting brands were blurred by all the movement the branding iron did. Other attempts at branding did little more than burn off the hair and a few were even applied upside down. I couldn't work the head gate and do the branding too; the catch device that's supposed to hold the head-gate closed slipped so I had to maintain pressure on the handle. Since the branding was done on the off side, I couldn't see what the fellow manning the irons was doing. We had pinkeye in the herd so I was tasked with filling three separate syringes, one an antibiotic, and two different vaccines; none of the guys I put in charge of this seemed

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## OVER THE JUMPS WITH STACIE BERTOLACCI

Article by Ingrid Edisen, Photos by Monica Adams

"I started as your normal horse-crazy kid." Stacie Bertolacci admitted. This was said in regards to her childhood in Florida where she first started taking lessons. Fast-forward to today, and you will find her busy with her 55-acre operation Scattered Oaks Farm in Manor, TX, just east of Austin. Stacie has been running her own stables since 1991 and moved to Manor location in 1996.

Stacie has ridden throughout her life. During high school, her family moved to Texas and she began working at barns such as Oakwell Farms in San Antonio. She then attended Texas A&M University and was enrolled in the horse studies program. During this time she began giving lessons and buying horses as sale prospects. She established Scattered Oaks Farm in 1996. It has

evolved into a thriving stable, which offers lessons, showing, training, and sales.

"I have students that compete both at the A level as well as local shows. I enjoy teaching all levels of riding at all ages" Stacie explained. Stacie focuses on the Hunter/Jumper discipline at Scattered Oaks. She briefly described the difference between hunter and jumper as similar to the differences found in figure versus speed skating. "In jumpers you find bigger jumps" she said. "It is timed and the precision of the turns and speed are considered. A hunter is judged more on style and form."

Stacie also enjoys riding and training herself. "I have both sale horses of my own as well as consignment horses" Stacie explained. "Re-

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Erin Sewell

## DRESSAGE QUALIFICATION STANDARDS POSTPONED

Just before the holidays the dressage community was in an uproar. Although it was common knowledge to some, many at the grassroots level became irate to learn that a USEF committee was considering a rule change. The committee was composed of several well-respected members such as Hilda Guerny and Lendon Gray. For the past three years this committee has hammered out a proposed rule change in an effort to raise the bar for folks who show dressage and to make the American system more in line with what is found in Europe.

Another reason cited for this rule change was the experience some judges had seeing poorly executed rides on upper level horses (sometimes referred to as "schoolmasters") by lesser skilled riders that was considered almost abusive to the horse. To put it in general terms, the rule change would make it mandatory for anyone riding at third level or above to have proven themselves first via accumulating a series of points (possibly ten to twenty points) at the lower levels in recognized shows. At first glance, the scores had to be a minimum of sixty and above, but later that was changed to 58 and above. The points go with the rider, not the horse. Roughly, the future point system might go as follows: scores of 58-59.99 percent would garner a rider one point; 60-62.99 would earn a rider two points, and so forth.

After much input from dressage riders, the committee met in early January and decided to table the whole issue for another year and to undertake further study. Dressage aficionados are allowed to still give input via their GMO's (local group membership organizations) or through their Participating Member delegate.

For more information on this issue visit: <http://www.usdf.org/press/news/view-news.asp?news=211>.

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