Chairman Talent, Ranking Member Baucus, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the development of a national animal identification plan.

The events of September 11, 2001 illustrated to all Americans how vulnerable our infrastructures are to terrorist attacks. In the National Strategy for Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets, released in February 2003, President Bush identified Agriculture and Food as one of the critical infrastructures of the country. Additionally, the President, by signing Homeland Presidential Directive #9 on January 30, 2004, further emphasized the critical need for a national policy to defend American agriculture and the nation's food system from terrorist attacks, major disasters and other emergencies. These definitive actions clearly illustrate the importance of this sector, and it confirms the long-held beliefs of American agriculturalists that significant safeguards must be put in place to protect it.

The identification of livestock in the United States (US), by both premise and individually, is critical to producers, veterinarians, state and federal animal health officials and laboratory diagnosticians to efficiently and effectively respond to an animal health emergency. The use of animal identification systems has always been important but it has become increasingly important in a post-9/11 environment where we realize that American agriculture is a potential target for terrorist activities. A heightened sense of awareness of the vulnerability of animal agriculture has energized the need for an effective national animal identification program. The safety of the nation's food supply, animal and human health are at risk, and the nation must be prepared to respond.

A successful plan, and the implementation thereof, must acknowledge three key tenets. By understanding the impact of these three tenets, the national effort to establish an animal identification system will have greater success.

Animal Identification is Not New

The first tenet is the recognition that the identification of animals has been an important function of animal production for centuries. The identification of animals is not new. Animal agriculture has utilized a wide range of identification devices to determine ownership, to designate selected animals of superior breeding, and to control and eradicate diseases. Brands, tattoos, ear tags, ear notches, back tags, group or lot numbers, and microchips are a few of the many identification systems used over the decades. Brands, for example, have been used for centuries to establish ownership of animals or to designate an animal as infected with a specific disease. Ear tags have been used for decades in national eradication initiatives, including, but not limited to, brucellosis, tuberculosis, classical swine fever (hog cholera), pseudorabies, and scrapie. Tattoos have played a critical role in the national brucellosis eradication program by providing the means of identification for cattle vaccinated against brucellosis. Ear notches have been used

successfully in swine for many years. Back tags have been used in the livestock marketing system to identify animals for traceback purposes to support many of the national eradication programs. Unfortunately, none of these identification techniques has provided producers with rapid traceback capability. Indiana has participated in all of these identification programs over the decades, and the shortcomings of the current means of identification and the lack of a national system have resulted in an inadequate traceback capability that exposes our commodities to the spread of disease.

Although the nation's animal producers have extensive experience with a variety of independent identification systems, it has become increasingly apparent that a comprehensive national animal identification plan is essential to the continuing success of American animal agriculture. While the identification of animals is not new, the critical need for a new plan with new goals is new. This effort must capitalize on the nation's long history of using identification in animals by leveraging the collective expertise of producers, veterinarians and other stakeholders to determine the best ways to select the appropriate means of identification and to implement the new plan.

The United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP)

The second key tenet is the recognition that a new plan that incorporates these new goals already exists. The United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) is the result of lengthy deliberations to provide a workable template to meet future US animal identification needs. Developed over the last two years by over 400 animal industry and state/federal government professionals representing more than 70 allied associations/organizations, it addresses the gaps in our current identification programs by addressing three important areas. The first is the goal of establishing a uniform premise identification system. Second, establishing a uniform, nationally recognizable numbering system for individual animals or for groups/lots of animals. Third, utilizing the premise and individual animal data to deliver credible information on the movements of animals within 48 hours of the discovery of a foreign animal disease in the United States. The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA), after careful review of the draft USAIP, passed a resolution in October 2003 endorsing it as a work in progress and encouraged USDA to establish species-specific working groups to further refine the document. The Species-Specific Working Groups have been established, and they are currently meeting to ensure the applicability of the USAIP to their commodities.

Animal populations around the globe have been destroyed because of the introduction of catastrophic diseases. The United Kingdom was ravaged by foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) three years ago, and over six million head of livestock had to be destroyed to contain the disease in a country the size of the state of Oregon. Taiwan's swine industry was decimated by classical swine fever (CSF), and the industry there has not regained its global prominence. These events illustrate the critical need for a national identification system that provides the best means to conduct traces of animals in the most time-efficient manner possible. The USAIP goal

to achieve a traceback system that can identify all animals and premises potentially exposed to a foreign animal disease within 48 hours of discovery is essential to the successful protection of America's agricultural assets.

In the fall of 2002 the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducted a tabletop exercise to simulate an intentional introduction of foot-and-mouth disease virus (FMDV). It became readily apparent during this exercise, as has been the case in similar exercises conducted by state animal health officials across the country, that to be effective in responding to the disease threat the locations of animals must be determined prior to the outbreak. During an exercise we held in Indiana, it became apparent that to begin to identify the locations of susceptible animals after learning of a disease incursion would result in catastrophic losses. The USAIP establishes a system to provide a uniform premise identification system. It is imperative that an effort be taken to assist the states in identifying all livestock locations within the country. Without this resource of information the viability of the affected commodity could be seriously compromised.

Individual animal identification or group/lot identification has been utilized for many years, and the USAIP ties this information to a specific livestock location. This is especially important when determining the birth origin of certain animals, the premises where the animals have been kept and the final destination of the animals. Utilizing individual identification tied to specific premises provides a much more effective tracing tool especially in disease events similar to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) case in Washington state in December 2003. Unfortunately, several head of cattle could not be found at the close of the BSE epidemiological investigation using current identification technologies. The USAIP states that Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID) is currently the preferred identification method for some types of livestock when individual animal identification is needed. The ability of producers to effectively trade their product in the marketplace requires a standardized system of individual identification, and the RFID is the technology of choice.

Establishing a Workable Timeline and Budget for Implementation

The third key tenet is the recognition that the successful implementation of the national animal identification plan will require a realistic timeline and budget. While the BSE case in the state of Washington has energized the need for a national animal identification program, a workable timeline is essential to the successful implementation of the plan. Further, while the US cattle industry has been the focus of much of the discussion on this issue, the needs of the other animal commodities must be addressed. To launch a national program without the proper infrastructure will delay the implementation of the USAIP, and it may lead to the failure of the effort. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman has tasked USDA's Chief Information Officer to develop the information technology component that will support the USAIP. The United States must have the ability to gather, store and retrieve data on hundreds of thousands of premises nationwide. This system must be flexible to respond to evolving animal identification

technologies, store key data elements on premises and animals nationwide, and satisfy the 48-hour traceback goal outlined in the USAIP. Issues associated with confidentiality of the information are also being addressed as the system is being developed. This database system must be functional before any mandate to implement the system is promulgated. The consequences of moving forward without this essential data management system will severely hamper the long-term success of the endeavor.

Additionally, the time needed to identify the livestock premises in the states will be dependent on the number of premises to be located. For example, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) of USDA reports 68,000 herds of cattle in Missouri. If, for example, these premises are to be identified within 90 days, the State of Missouri must register 765 herds per day. A similar calculation for the state of Texas with 151,000 herds of cattle will require the registration of 1,678 herds per day to meet the 90-day timeline. In Indiana we have established a partnership with our commodity organizations to address the identification plan. For example, the Indiana Beef Cattle Association has recently named an Identification Working Group to address the specific needs of Indiana beef producers, and we will have on-going discussions with all segments of the beef industry to more this effort forward. Therefore, a reasonable timeline must be established for states and commodity organizations to implement the program, and this is one of the tasks given to the Species Specific Working Groups that are functioning under the goals established by the USAIP.

The implementation and maintenance of a national animal identification program will require significant resources. Stakeholders in the USAIP recognize the value of the plan, and yet, they also recognize the potential costs associated with its implementation. A public/private partnership must be forged that will effectively address the budget issues inherent in the plan. Resources must be identified at the federal level to protect animal agriculture through the USAIP, particularly in the formative stages of implementation. This effort will fail without the commitment of the federal government to leverage the efforts of the states to implement a national animal and premise identification plan.

The three key tenets addressed today: the recognition that animal identification is not new and leveraging the national experience with various identification systems is essential; that a plan exists to address the national need for a comprehensive animal identification system; and that a workable timeline and budget that addresses the uniqueness of each commodity must be established for the implementation of the new plan; are intended to draw attention to the fundamental aspects of a successful effort to launch a sustainable national animal identification plan.

Chairman Talent, thank you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee on this very important issue. I look forward to your questions.