

The U. S. Animal Identification Plan

Article by Shiela Cochran

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I am going to attempt to give you the “Shiela Cliff notes” version of the article written by American Horse Council regarding the issue of the Animal Identification Plan. I have heard many comments on this issue. Many folks are worried this is going to be a “Big Brother” (let’s be politically correct and say “Big Sibling”) action from the government. The USAIP only applies to cattle and swine right now. It does have a section for horses however that is only for future use if needed.

Let’s take a look at why this was originally brought about and who is actually involved with this plan. The U. S. Animal Identification Group is the team that is working on this plan. The members comprising this team are Livestock Marketing Association, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, National Milk Producers Federation, the National Pork Producers Council, the American Sheep Industry and of course the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The group came together with the concerns of diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease, Hog Cholera, and Mad Cow Disease. The plan will create a standardized alphanumeric system that can trace back an animal within 48 hours of a confirmed diagnosis. This protects not only our animal agriculture industry but protects the consumer. I live in North Idaho not far from the farms that are on quarantine in Eastern Washington and the USDA are still trying to track down where the other members of the herd are that the one cow that tested positive came from. Hundreds of animals have been destroyed and folks are a bit nervous. These diseases are devastating. What a time and animal saver this will be.

I can understand folks feeling like there will be another entity acting as “Big Sibling” especially during a time when many rights get treaded upon. However, I would like to just take a moment to look at the USAIP from another angle that we as horse owners may use this to our advantage. If the horse industry could be active in designing this program, maybe this plan could be a safety net for our horses. This is just my opinion and not something that is being worked on. I live in the west. When I moved here I was informed about state employees named “Brand Inspectors”. Now, growing up on the east coast and living in the Midwest a great deal, I had no idea what the heck all that was about. I made several calls and after much frustration I finally got to speak to a “Brand Inspector” who gave me the information on this new adventure. Well, what I found out was I had to have this agent come out, inspect my animals and paperwork, him record the information and me pay a fee. And for what?! I felt it was an invasion of my privacy with no real benefit for me. And “Taxation without representation” sort of came to mind. I have one of my horses already microchipped. I had that done while I was still living in Iowa. I wish I had been able to microchip all four while I was still there. It is more than twice the amount to have them done here in Idaho. I know they have them registered at a central location. I know that the manufactures have given those readers to almost every shelter and packing plant. But who enforces a mandatory reading done?

Here is my opinion. And remember this is just my opinion. What if we had a national registry (funded by the Feds), monitored by someone like the American Horse Council, that we can use to protect our horses from theft. Once a horse is stolen, the owner calls the registry about the theft. The registry then sends out a notice of alert within hours to all auction houses, shelters, meat packing plants regionally or nationally and local papers. This plan should enforce that all auction houses and packaging plants scan all horse brought in. Penalties ensure that those entities follow the protocol. I have heard too many stories of theft and harm to our wonderful horses. I would love there to be a way to protect our horses and our investment. That investment is not just the money we pay, but the heart and sweat that goes into our horsey lives.

I do want to let you know that folks like Kandee Haertel of ELCR and the American Horse Council are keeping an eye on the U. S. Animal Identification Plan. I encourage you all to read the whole article from the AHC at www.horsecouncil.org. I hope this synopsis has helped some of you to sort out all that has been said on this issue.

In closing dear friends, we all need to be “Watch Horses” on all issues affecting us horsey kin. United we stand.

May your skies be always fair and your trails always true,
Shiela Cochran

P.S. I will be writing upcoming articles on issues facing us for the open trail. Our partner ELCR is sending me information and I will pass it on to you. I will also write an article pertaining to my Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning program that I am putting together here in Idaho. Right now I am in the ‘pre-fledgling stage. I will be starting out with grief recovery and hopefully in the near future expand to helping those with learning disabilities-both youth programs. I have done some work on a very small scale the past two summers. This will be a more polished program.