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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Washington, DC 20515-6115**

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February 21, 2008

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Ms. Rose Mason  
Assistant Position  
Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association  
P.O. Box 40  
Beetown, WI 53802-0040

Dear Ms. Mason:

The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations are investigating the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) recent proposal to close the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) and move its biological research laboratory, including its research on foot-and-mouth disease, to a new location on the mainland United States. As we consider this issue, we would like to obtain your views on the DHS proposal.

### **Background**

The Plum Island laboratory has been in operation for more than 50 years, the majority of that time owned and managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In June 2003, operational responsibility for Plum Island was transferred to DHS. The majority of the research at Plum Island is concentrated on foot-and-mouth disease, which is very highly contagious, as your organization is surely aware. The Plum Island laboratory has also conducted research on classical swine fever, African swine fever, and other animal diseases.

The Plum Island laboratory was originally sited on Plum Island due to concerns that an accidental release of foot-and-mouth disease or other hazardous diseases would pose a serious threat to animal health and, in some cases, human health and the environment. The natural barrier of water surrounding the island, along with its remoteness at the far end of Long Island, New York, were perceived as an effective buffer zone between Plum Island research and farming activities in the rest of the country. So far, this natural barrier has proven effective. Since the Plum Island laboratory was established more than 50 years ago, foot-and-mouth disease has never escaped from the island.

There is no doubt that a release of viral agents spreading foot-and-mouth disease or swine fever could be devastating to the livestock industry in the United States. The 2001 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom resulted in the destruction of millions of cattle and sheep and

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cost more than \$16 billion. An additional outbreak in the U.K. in 2007 was identified and isolated almost immediately, so its economic effects were limited. These incidents illustrate how easily the disease can spread from a government research facility located in a farming community on the mainland of England.

### **The Issue**


In light of the danger posed by foot-and-mouth disease, as illustrated by the incidents in the United Kingdom, we are concerned that there has been inadequate consideration given to the hazards of shutting down the current Plum Island laboratory and transferring foot-and-mouth disease research into the interior of the United States.

Therefore, we are interested in the opinion of your organization regarding DHS's proposal. Please consider the following questions and issues in your reply:

- Does your organization support moving foot-and-mouth disease from Plum Island to a research facility on the mainland United States?
- What would be the estimated cost to your membership of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United States?
- Does your organization believe modern technology is adequate to prevent the accidental release of foot-and-mouth disease—or other contagious diseases affecting livestock—from a research facility located on the mainland United States?
- If an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease were to occur on the mainland United States, does your organization believe that Federal, State, and local authorities are prepared to identify, isolate, and halt the spread of such an outbreak before it caused significant damage?

So that we may have adequate time to consider your views, please provide your comments on these issues no later than March 11, 2008. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact John Arlington, Senior Investigative Counsel, with the Committee on Energy and Commerce staff at (202) 226-2424.

Sincerely,



John D. Dingell  
Chairman



Bart Stupak  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

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cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable John Shimkus, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations