

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Reducing Threats to our Nation’s Agriculture:
Authorizing a National Bio and
Agro-Defense Facility”**

May 23, 2007 (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 hearing entitled “Reducing Threats to our Nation’s Agriculture: Authorizing a National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility”:

“Many of us remember the stir caused when former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, announced his resignation, warning that the U.S. food supply could be a lethal target for terrorist and we are at significant risk of a flu pandemic.

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 9, issued in 2004, identified the need for safe, secure and state-of-the-art biosafety laboratories that research and develop diagnostic capabilities for foreign animal and zoonotic diseases (those that infect both animals and humans). We understand that Plum Island Animal Disease Center, in New York, is currently performing much of this research and is nearing the end of its lifecycle.

The threat of foreign animal diseases — especially zoonotic diseases — to the Public health and the agriculture industries has been a reality for many years.

The Committee on Homeland Security recognizes the need for increased vigilance in fighting and protecting against the spread of current and future infectious diseases that threaten public health and agriculture.

We also understand that the current research lab at Plum Island was designed primarily to study the accidental introduction of foreign disease agents and not the additional research needed to prepare for an intentional bioterrorism attack.

I am pleased this Committee is moving forward with efforts to address the issue of the aging research facility, act on the guidance offered through HSPD-9, and assess the current working relationships between the DHS and USDA.”

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