

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Federal Efforts to Mitigate Vulnerabilities in the Food Supply Chain”**

July 24, 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 “Federal Efforts to Mitigate Vulnerabilities in the Food Supply Chain”:

“The theme of this hearing is extremely fitting given the circumstances this past year, where our nation has had to deal with issues of pet food, spinach, peanut butter, and more recently bans on toothpaste, and even the FDA ban of seafood products.

The major threat to the food agriculture sector is a crisis of confidence, where a poorly prevented or recognized event causes people to question the safety of food regionally or nationally. The time to address whether our federal infrastructure is designed to mitigate vulnerabilities is before an occurrence and not after the fact. We have been extremely fortunate that our agriculture has been safe, but we’ve got work to do if we want to be more secure.

Currently, 15 agencies collectively administer at least 30 laws related to food safety, causing ineffective oversight, inefficient coordination, and inconsistent agency leadership. One concern I look forward to hearing our witnesses address today, is the current agency leadership structure in place in the event of a food-borne emergency.

HSPD-9 sets out to address this by establishing the Department of Homeland Security as having the lead role in policy coordination in an event of national significance. However, a recent GAO report says that USDA is not planning for DHS to assume the lead coordinating role if an outbreak among poultry occurs that is sufficient in scope to warrant a presidential declaration of an emergency or major disaster, or a DHS declaration of an Incident of National Significance.

Such an inconsistency in planning perpetuates the confusion of who’s in charge. I look forward to the second panel – comprised of industry, academic and state agriculture officials – giving us a more local perspective of what uncoordinated efforts mean for our communities. Furthermore, I look forward to discussing State and industry involvement throughout all of the coordination and planning. Reports indicate that they do not have the ability and information to fulfill their assigned roles in protecting agriculture. Though I am pleased to hear that strides in CARVER + Shock technology have been made in hardening our infrastructure against an intentional attack, technology is on as good as its application.

Unless the relevant agencies begin to take HSPD-9 a step further, the United States will lack a coordinated national approach to protect against agroterrorism, possibly resulting in gaps or needless duplication of effort. By overcoming these challenges, the United States will be in a better position to protect against and respond to a food-borne disease outbreak, whether natural or intentional.”

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