

Field Hearing -- House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Management Investigations and Oversight

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“Farm to Fork: Partnerships to Protect the Food You Eat”

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Chairman Carney, Committee members, congressional support staff, and invited guests, thank you for inviting me to share with you at this committee hearing “Farm to Fork: Partnerships to Protect the Food You Eat”.

My name is Dave Filson, I am the Emergency Preparedness and Emergency Response Coordinator, and Partnership Expansion Leader for Penn State Cooperative Extension. I am also the chair-elect for the National Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN). I have been with Penn State Extension for 22 years.

In my current role, I have a professional working perspective and involvement in interagency collaboration, or partnerships, at the federal, state, and local level between and among stakeholders across the entire continuum from “Farm to Fork”. I have co-authored a series of three OG&T reviewed and approved courses on Agricultural Emergences and Disasters, and have collaborated with other universities, APHIS, and various agencies and organizations on training material specific to emergency management for agriculture disasters and emergency preparedness.

I will focus my comments around these areas:

- The Importance of Agriculture,
- The Cost of a Major Agriculture Disaster,
- The Partnerships in the Food and Agriculture System,
- Documenting the Need, and finally,
- Recommendations.

The Importance of Agriculture

Less than 3 % of our population is directly involved in production agriculture, and yet that group of committed farmers and ranchers generate cash receipts in excess of \$900 billion dollars or about 10 % of U.S. Gross Domestic Product. Include the allied and support industries and we have about 50 billion annually contributing to the national trade balance. U.S. agricultural exports are more than twice the exports sold by other U.S. industries. The U.S. food system employees an additional 15 % of the U.S. workforce across the diverse network from “Farm to Fork”. U.S. citizens spend less than 11 % of their disposable income to feed their families with the most nutritious, most diverse, and safest food supply in the world. Around the world, other nations must spend two to three times, or up to 30 % of their disposable income on food. Food and agriculture is not only big business, it is vital for our very existence.

The Cost of a Major Agriculture Disaster

The Foot and Mouth outbreak in Great Britain cost that country \$32 billion dollars. If a similar scale outbreak occurred in the United States, the estimates on the financial loss to the economy range as high as \$140 billion dollars. Additional loss would come from loss of domestic and export markets and a loss of confidence in the food system and agencies who are charged with protecting our food system.

The Partnerships in the Food and Agriculture System

When we use the term “partnership” in the context of protecting the food we eat, the number of agencies with responsibility in these partnerships is so diverse that it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe how we as a nation ensure the safety of our food and agriculture system. No less than five federal agencies have some responsibility to ensure the safety of the food system. USDA and FDA have the most visible roles, but Homeland Security has overall responsibility. EPA and Health and Human Services have responsibilities at some point. To complicate the issue further, lead roles in food safety change from agency to agency depending on whether the role is during Prevention and Preparation, or during Response and Recovery. At the state level, similar diverse and varied responsibilities are held by state level agencies that sometimes are similar to federal agency responsibilities. The state Department of Agriculture is lead partner with the responsibilities for animals, plants, and some food products. Other state level agencies have various responsibilities for food and agriculture safety. At the local level, the diversity of responsibility, and I might add level of preparedness, is even more diverse. Many counties do not have a comprehensive Emergency Management Plan that addresses Food and Agriculture issues. Some counties have a plan that was developed from a generic template that was borrowed, and there are some counties that have a legitimate working document in which the stakeholders and local agency partners are identified and a protocol or standard operating procedure is identified for Food and Agricultural incidents.

The system truly is complex. HSPD 9 in part says: “The United States agriculture and food systems are vulnerable to disease, pest, or poisonous agents that occur naturally, are unintentionally introduced, or are intentionally delivered by acts of terrorism. America’s agriculture and food system is an extensive, open, interconnected, diverse, and complex structure providing potential targets for terrorist attacks. We should provide the best protection possible against a successful attack on the United States agriculture and food system, which could have catastrophic health and economic effects.”

One could argue that the system in place to protect our food and agriculture system with multiple agencies at federal, state, and local level is also . . . an extensive, open, interconnected, diverse, and complex structure. A flow chart that tracks a commodity from “Farm to Fork” and identifies the various agencies that may have oversight responsibility across that continuum is mind boggling!

My comments are not intended to be overly critical. Our system of food and agriculture safety is very complex, *but it works!* Could it be improved? *Yes.* Can we ensure zero risk? *Absolutely*

not. Partnerships exist and they function, but sometimes the effectiveness of the partnership is limited intentionally, or unintentionally, by silo or stovepipe philosophy.

Within agencies, information and collaboration is more functional. Communication up and down within an agency, both at the federal and state level, occurs freely. That same degree of collaboration and communication across or between agencies is not nearly as open and free. Sometimes important information on an incident is held within an agency until a critical point is reached. Then, information may be shared across agencies. The partnership is utilized when it becomes imperative to bring others into the conversation. Precious time can be lost until all agencies are fully functional and engaged in the incident.

Communication and collaboration issues have been identified in nearly every exercise, and nearly every report on agency response capabilities. A March 20, 2007 GAO report, "Critical Infrastructure Challenges Remain in Protecting Key Sectors," Agriculture and Food is one of the critical infrastructures and key sectors. The barriers to success as identified in the report are:

1. Difficulties in developing partnerships with DHS.
2. Concerns about sharing information.
3. Lack of long standing working relationships.

As our society and our culture are changed by the events of the world, our way of doing business needs to change as well. Change is difficult for everyone. We are doing business differently, which is necessary. Some who are directly affected by changes in agency roles and accountability are challenged to perform in a new work environment. Time will help, but we must all be accountable for our individual and collective role and responsibility to ensure a safe and secure food and agriculture system. You, as House Homeland Security Committee members are included in that charge.

Documenting the Need

Significant resources have been channeled from various sources -- Homeland Security, HHS, USDA, FDA, and others -- to build a better food and agriculture safety system. That has been a wise investment. But allow me to ask, when we consider the entire continuum from "Farm to Fork", how much have we invested to ensure food and agriculture safety on the farm? The very hub of the system has been largely ignored. Agencies are better staffed, better equipped, better trained, better exercised, more knowledgeable, but what about the poultry producers on the Eastern Shore, the Northeastern dairy producers, the Mid-west corn and soybean growers, the Western cattle feeders, swine producers in North Carolina, and Washington State apple growers? What Homeland Security or other agency resources have been dedicated to the safety and security of our food and agriculture system for the producer at the farm or ranch?

A national survey of agriculture producers (n,337 from 34 states) by the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), asked producers a series of questions. When asked, *How likely do you think it is that agroterrorism could happen somewhere in the U.S.?*, the majority, 77 %, indicated that an agroterrorism event was likely to happen. Most thought it would not happen to them individually, but that it would occur. When asked, *Do you believe you are properly*

prepared for agroterrorism or some other biosecurity threat on your operation?, only 14 % said yes. Ladies and Gentlemen this should be a concern to all of us. What resources have we invested to improve this situation? I'm not aware of any funds, from any federal funding agency, allocated to improve our agricultural producers' level of preparedness for food and agriculture safety and security issues. No producer continuity of operation plans, no agriculture producer contingency plans, no producer disaster and terrorism plans... . We have a 900 billion dollar industry that has not received support to prepare for disasters including terrorism. HSPD 9 says we should provide the best protection possible. Shouldn't that protection also include the producer?

Numerous GAO reports indicate the critical nature of surveillance and detection. Where better to enhance surveillance and detection than at the production level and by the individuals whose livelihood depends on a continuous market of safe and nutritious agricultural commodities?

Multi-agency response and recovery enhancement is important, but resources on the front end, at the producer level, including surveillance and detection, and individual disaster and terrorist plans for agriculture producers may, in fact, will likely, result in fewer potential incidents escalating to disaster status when response and recovery are required.

In the same EDEN Survey I mentioned earlier, producers were asked, *If you discovered a crop disease outbreak on your farm that you didn't recognize, to whom would you turn for advice?* 80 % of the producers across the nation indicated that they would turn to the Cooperative Extension Service. The other two groups with highest number of responses were the State Department of Agriculture, or another farmer or rancher. Same group different question, *Who would they turn to if they discovered an animal disease outbreak?* The highest response was their local veterinarian, which is logical. Following closely was the Cooperative Extension System. In no response on whom to contact did they indicate Homeland Security, FEMA, APHIS, FDA.

Recommendations:

- Accept the fact that we will never have zero risk.
- Increase and improve communication at all levels with all agencies and with all partners
- Include representation and consider the input of the working farmer or rancher, and the agriculture industry on committees at all levels.
- Ask agriculture producers what should be done to improve food and agriculture safety and security.
- Use real world incidents such as spinach, peanut butter, wheat gluten, Foot and Mouth Disease, Anthrax, soybean rust, Exotic New Castle Disease, Plum Pox Virus, and other real-life food safety incidents as valuable learning experiences. Find out what went wrong and then try to fix it. Share reports and findings across all agencies.
- Support and enhance existing resources and networks such as the Cooperative Extension System, the Extension Disaster Education Network, and other established resources. Re-focus efforts towards Food and Agriculture Safety and Security at the producer level.
- Ensure that states and local municipalities have Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans that have resources, tasks, and protocols or standard operating procedures developed

to accurately represent the local food and agriculture community for all disasters including food and agriculture disasters.

- Practice / test plans at all levels with all stakeholders including agriculture producers, who would be involved in a response effort for a food or agriculture disaster or terrorism incident.
- Support increased emphasis on surveillance and detection by education of First Detectors, including producers, adequately trained technicians, and adequately equipped laboratories for the National Plant Diagnostic Network and the National Animal Health Laboratory Network.
- Support educational programs to increase awareness of the complexity of the agriculture production system to agency staff and First Responders, and educational programs to increase the awareness of the food and agriculture safety system including NIMS and NRP for the agriculture industry. CSREES and the Cooperative Extension system have established credibility and science to meet these needs.
- Evaluate the work – What has been the effectiveness of resource allocation at all levels to improve the safety and security of our food and agriculture system? Is the system anymore safe or prepared for disaster than before investments? To what degree? At what levels?
- Provide training in crisis communication for all agencies who have food and agriculture safety and security responsibility, and who interact with the public.
- Encourage better coordination and collaboration between federal and state agencies, academia, local responders, and the private sector, including the agriculture industry.
- Support the development of an improved media campaign to educate the public before, during, and after a disastrous event including terrorism that will reduce fear and panic.
- Support research and public outreach programs that addresses current emerging issues on food and agriculture safety and security. Again, the Cooperative Extension system has science-based research in the national Land-Grant system and reach capability into every county and parish in the United States to address that need.

As we focus on the “the Partnerships that Protect the Food You Eat”, please consider the importance of the food production industry. Consider how we, collectively, with financial support, and with existing resources and networks can place more emphasis on preparedness and preparation, surveillance and detection, response and recovery with possibly the most important partner in this partnership, the American Farmer and Rancher !

Thank you for opportunity to provide my professional perspective on the partnerships in the “Farm to Fork” food system.