

STATEMENT OF DR. EDWARD KNIPLING
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BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS, CYBERSECURITY, AND
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
ON
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL BIO AND AGRO-DEFENSE
FACILITY.

MAY 23, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Dr. Edward Knipling, Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Accompanying me is Mr. Kevin Shea, Associate Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). ARS is the primary intramural science research agency of USDA, operating a network of over 100 research laboratories across the nation on all aspects of agricultural science. APHIS is responsible for protecting and promoting U.S. agricultural health, administering the Animal Welfare Act, and carrying out wildlife damage management activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to present the Department's views on the establishment of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF).

Mr. Chairman, the need to establish this facility is basically two fold: First, it is needed to replace the aging foreign animal disease research, diagnostic and training facility at Plum Island; and, second, it is needed to provide additional space and capability for animal borne diseases that can be transmitted to humans. Homeland Security Presidential Directive No. 9 (HSPD-9) identifies the need for "safe, secure, and state-of-the-art agricultural biocontainment facilities to research and develop diagnostic capabilities for foreign animal and zoonotic diseases." Current limitations at existing facilities result in a backlog of needed space for important experiments, diagnostics, and training efforts.

Despite the planned replacement of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) with NBAF, the PIADC must continue to operate during NBAF construction and beyond to allow adequate transition to the new facility and eventual facility decommissioning at Plum Island. It is estimated that PIADC facilities must operate for about the next 7-10 years. The highest priority for facility upgrade includes the construction of additional animal holding (experiment) facilities (10,000 ft²) and expansion of the necropsy room capacity. The additional capacity is needed to

address the coordinated USDA-DHS vaccine development program over the next 7-10 years.

The upgrade and expansion of the necropsy facility will also improve our current educational facility for the foreign animal disease (FAD) training schools carried out by APHIS at PIADC. APHIS conducts these training schools on Plum Island to ensure that our Nation's corps of foreign animal disease diagnosticians—those specially trained veterinarians immediately dispatched by APHIS to investigate and, if necessary, respond to possible introductions of exotic animal diseases into the United States—have the latest scientific and technical information and skills necessary to carry out their work. APHIS also conducts its confirmatory testing for extremely contagious foreign animal diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), at the PIADC. In addition, the Agency houses the North American Foot-and-Mouth Disease vaccine bank on PIADC. The bank ensures that if FMD were to be found in North America and vaccination was to be used as a tool in the ensuing control and eradication program, adequate supply of vaccine would be quickly available to animal health officials.

Under Section 310(a) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Secretary of Agriculture transferred PIADC to the Secretary of Homeland Security, including the assets and liabilities of PIADC. Section 310(b) of the Act required the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into an agreement upon such transfer **to ensure that USDA is able to carry out research, diagnostic, and other activities of USDA at PIADC.** USDA-ARS, USDA-APHIS and DHS-S&T entered into an Interagency Agreement dated June 1, 2003, (“the FY03 Agreement”) which together with successor agreements sets forth the Parties’ agreements regarding the management, administration, and operations of PIADC, and the Parties’ respective rights and responsibilities for research, diagnostic, and development activities at PIADC. According to this agreement, a Board of Directors (BOD) is composed of the Directors or Administrators of APHIS, ARS and DHS-S&T Directorate. A Senior Leadership Group (SLG), composed of the senior administrators of each agency at PIADC, executes the FY03 Agreement, implements policies, coordinates at the local level and reports to the BOD.

DHS’s work currently focuses primarily on FMD; whereas ARS, in addition to FMD, also addresses other diseases, specifically classical swine fever and vesicular stomatitis. A FMD countermeasure roadmap was prepared in 2004 to coordinate DHS and ARS activities. According to this document, ARS would maintain responsibility for basic research, and DHS would focus on product development. A high priority disease diagnostic roadmap was prepared in 2006 to coordinate DHS, ARS, and APHIS activities in this area.

Mr. Chairman this concludes my remarks. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.