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APHIS Safeguarding

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has an overall biosecurity system designed to prevent threats to America's agricultural system. An integral part of that biosecurity system is USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). APHIS has a safeguarding system to prevent introductions of foreign animal diseases (FAD), non-native animal and plant pests, and plant pathogens. Through the system, APHIS also maintains a response mechanism designed to contain and eradicate foreign pests and pathogens.

Active Prevention

Over the last decade, APHIS has continued to update safeguarding measures as new science and information has become available. Outbreaks of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in Europe brought about an overall heightened state of awareness of the potential impact foreign animal disease outbreaks can have on agriculture. APHIS responded to these threats by stepping up inspections of travelers entering or returning to the United States as well as inspections of cargo imports. APHIS also banned items from BSE- and FMD-affected countries and worked with importers, shippers, airlines, the travel industry, and the public to ensure that banned items that could act as a disease vector did not enter the country. APHIS maintains agricultural product bans for a number of countries around the world to ensure that foreign pathogens and pests don't gain access to America's agriculture.

The outbreaks of FMD around the world in 2001 also prompted USDA to strengthen disease exclusion efforts by hiring additional safeguarding/inspection personnel and placing them at high-risk U.S. ports of entry. The Secretary authorized spending an additional \$32 million in agricultural quarantine inspection (AQI) user fee funding to bolster its inspection forces. APHIS will increase its inspection personnel by approximately 1,229 people between the end of fiscal year (FY) 2000 and FY 2002. This is a 50 percent increase over fiscal year 2000 hiring levels. Included in these new inspection personnel, APHIS is also hiring 18 new veterinarians for its comprehensive AQI program to bolster the United States' agriculture infrastructure. The new veterinarians will join approximately 5,000 APHIS personnel already on alert at our Nation's borders, ports of entry, and on farms, ensuring preparedness programs are in place to protect U.S. agriculture.

Active Eradication

While APHIS inspectors and border veterinarians look outward from America's borders searching for agricultural threats, APHIS scientists look inward to the Nation's farms and ranch lands. APHIS maintains a network of FAD diagnosticians throughout America. These disease diagnosticians can be on-site anywhere in the continental United States within 4 hours in case of an emergency. APHIS maintains animal disease diagnostic laboratories on Plum Island, NY, and in Ames, IA, which can quickly and safely diagnose animal diseases at anytime. In addition to FAD diagnosticians, APHIS also includes local, State, and other Federal veterinarians in the network by providing FAD training and working locally on potential FAD cases.

On Guard

Since September 11, 2001, APHIS has heightened its already vigilant efforts to prevent foreign pests and diseases from entering the United States. APHIS has undertaken numerous short- and long-term measures to strengthen its infrastructure through increased funding; closer coordination with industry, State, and other Federal organizations; improved research; and program reviews. These measures ensure America's agriculture is protected and remains prosperous.

As part of the January 2002 Defense Appropriations Act, USDA received funding to improve these APHIS and other agencies' safeguarding abilities:

- \$105 million for pest and disease exclusion, detection, and monitoring
- \$80 million for upgrading USDA facilities and operational security
- \$50 million for an animal bio-containment facility at the National Animal Disease Laboratory to serve both APHIS and the Agricultural Research Service
- \$23 million for the Plum Island Animal Disease Center
- \$15 million for security upgrades and bioterrorism protection for the Food Safety and Inspection Service and
- \$14 million for increased security measures at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, IA.

Currently, the Department is developing specific spending plans for these appropriated funds.

Industry, State, and Federal Coordination

APHIS has always been committed to ensuring its stakeholders as well as State and Federal counterparts are fully aware of and support the Agency's biosecurity efforts to protect American agriculture. Since September 11, closer coordination and sharing emergency preparedness information has become even more vital.

The 50 States are USDA's first line of defense in protecting agriculture, and APHIS continues to strengthen its State-Federal partnerships. APHIS recently provided nearly \$2 million to 32 States to bolster emergency animal disease prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery systems. Funding provided will be used for training, purchasing equipment, and conducting exercises to simulate animal health emergencies. The goal of the grant program is to assist States in meeting and exceeding animal disease response standards set by a steering committee of the National Animal Health Emergency Management System.

As a means to regularly communicate with States and provide and share information on anthrax and general emergency preparedness, APHIS has been participating in monthly National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA)-coordinated conference calls with several dozen State agriculture commissioners. These calls have been extremely successful and have been ongoing since October 2001.

Because FADs do not necessarily abide by international or even State boundaries, APHIS has worked with States, such as Florida and Texas, and other Federal agencies to design cooperative plans for handling potential outbreaks and to conduct FAD outbreak exercises and scenarios to monitor FAD emergency response readiness.

In the event of an FAD introduction, the agricultural livestock communities as well as veterinary practitioners would provide critical support and partner with APHIS in responding to an outbreak. To ensure these groups are prepared to deal with a potential FAD situation, APHIS has been in regular contact with them since September 11. In October 2001, APHIS sponsored its Sixth Annual Emergency Preparedness Satellite Seminar, the goal of which was to share vital information with veterinary practitioners across the country on how to identify and respond to an animal health emergency. Approximately 1,700 Federal and State veterinary officials and emergency planners, military representatives, and veterinary college students and professors benefitted from the satellite broadcast.

To formalize a method in which APHIS could activate private veterinarians across the country to assist with an FAD outbreak, APHIS and the

American Veterinary Medical Association announced in January 2001 the creation of a National Animal Health Response Corps. This group is made up of more than 275 private veterinarians from around the United States who would become temporary Federal employees on short notice and assist APHIS veterinarians in field and laboratory operations during a FAD situation. These veterinarians would supplement APHIS' existing staff for periods of up to 60 days and assist with examining herds for clinical signs of disease; vaccinating; collecting specimens; collecting epidemiological information; supervising disposal of animal carcasses; and inspecting livestock markets, trucks, and vehicles.

Internal coordination has become increasing important since September 11, and APHIS and USDA are committed to doing their part as it relates to homeland protection. APHIS has provided specialists to assist with the Office of Homeland Security and APHIS has coordinated efforts with the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Customs Service, and law enforcement agencies on biosecurity issues and emergency preparedness.

The Future

As new technologies are created and science evolves, APHIS will remain on the forefront of the effort to prevent the introduction of foreign agricultural pests and pathogens. New ideas and programs designed to safeguard American agriculture are moving forward as plans for high-tech x ray machines and specially trained port operations dogs are initiated. By the end of FY 2003, APHIS' goal is to triple the number of canine teams that work at ports of entry and international mail facilities to 150 teams. APHIS continues to expand not only its inspection, veterinary, and scientific personnel, but its cooperative efforts among industry, government, and private sources. APHIS also works closely with stakeholders, industry, State, and foreign governments to ensure a free flow of information among scientists, academics, and the public.

The future of APHIS is the same as the past. It is protection. It is safeguarding America's borders. It is ensuring that the health of America's agriculture is never threatened. The processes by which APHIS protects America's healthy and diverse food supply have been increasingly challenged. However, APHIS is committed to taking the lead in building and maintaining a world-class system of exclusion, surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and response.

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