

News from
Congressman Christopher Carney
Representing Northeast and Central Pennsylvania

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**CARNEY STATEMENT FOR HOMELAND SECURITY
AGRO-TERRORISM HEARING**

Washington, D.C.--Congressman Christopher P. Carney, Chairman of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight, issued the following opening statement for the Subcommittee hearing, "Farm to Fork: Partnerships to Protect the Food You Eat":

"First, I'd like to thank everyone for joining us here today in our neck of the woods – it's not every day that Tunkhannock, let alone Northeastern Pennsylvania gets to host a congressional hearing.

"Thanks also to the Subcommittee's Ranking Member, Congressman Rogers, for taking a couple days out of his busy July 4th schedule to travel all the way up here from Alabama – hopefully, the weather's a bit more bearable up here than down there this time of year.

"Finally, I'd like to thank our friends at Cargill for allowing us all to come up and visit this morning.

"Anyway, we're here today to examine how the Department of Homeland Security will work with its partners at all levels of government, as well as with the private sector, in the event of a large-scale food contamination or agro-terror event.

"Agriculture is one of Pennsylvania's leading industries. According to data compiled by the state's Department of Agriculture, 59,000 farm families farm over 7.7 million acres in this state alone. And it's not just farmers that contribute to our agriculture industry – there are over 2,000 food processing businesses scattered across the state that create goods for market, or prepare foodstuffs for the next step towards finished product.

"Pennsylvania is not alone. Many states rely upon agriculture as a major piece of their economy.

"Most consumers take for granted what it takes to keep bringing food to their tables. Aside from just planting, farming, and harvesting, the industry produces, packs, and ships to markets. Not to mention safety, which is integral to every step of the process.

“While domestic sources account for the vast majority of what appears on our plates at every meal, America imports roughly 15% of what we eat.

“Food and agriculture safety are paramount to not only our health, but our economy, as well. We’ve already seen relatively small scale food scares, be it dirty scallions, tainted spinach, e. coli outbreaks, et cetera. But if we were facing a truly widespread event - let alone an intentional one - the nation could be crippled.

“In this state alone, production agriculture and related agribusiness contributes over \$40 billion to our economy annually. Putting aside the economic damages, responding to potential health issues would also be daunting.

“In the event of a large-scale food safety event, we cannot have mass confusion. Clear leadership is a must.

“It is up to the Department of Homeland Security to coordinate any crisis response should our nation's agriculture industry come under attack, while respecting the expertise of other federal agencies and state and local governments, as well.

“As we have seen in other scenarios, some agencies that should be listening to DHS treat it more like the new kid on the block, which hinders its ability to operate effectively. DHS has the responsibility of coordinating response, disseminating information, and allocating needed resources.

“It only makes sense that if there were an agro-terror or food contamination event DHS would coordinate not only with state and local governments, but with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department Health and Human Services, and the Food and Drug Administration; they are agencies with more focused expertise.

“Homeland Security has also established partnerships with industry, as well. The federal government is great at large-scale planning and response, but private industry is much better suited to police itself from food contamination or agro-terror.

“Long before DHS was stood up, Taylor Packing, what is now the Cargill Plant that we toured this morning, established and upheld standards of excellence in food handling. It is vital that our farmers and small businesses continue to do everything they can do to ensure the safety and quality of our food.

“Ensuring that robust security and food handling procedures are in place and in practice at every agribusiness is essential to preventing an economically devastating agro-event. The Department of Homeland Security, state and local governments have done a good job preventing a food catastrophe thus far, and I’m looking forward to hearing from Mr. Filson and Dr. Hoerr to hear their thoughts on how we can better prepare and prevent any future agro-event.”

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