



Highlights of [GAO-05-214](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. agriculture generates more than \$1 trillion per year in economic activity and provides an abundant food supply for Americans and others. Since the September 11, 2001, attacks, there are new concerns about the vulnerability of U.S. agriculture to the deliberate introduction of animal and plant diseases (agroterrorism). Several agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Defense (DOD), play a role in protecting the nation against agroterrorism. GAO examined (1) the federal agencies' roles and responsibilities to protect against agroterrorism, (2) the steps that the agencies have taken to manage the risks of agroterrorism, and (3) the challenges and problems that remain.

## What GAO Recommends

To enhance the agencies' ability to reduce the risk of agroterrorism, GAO recommends, among other things, that (1) USDA examine the costs and benefits of developing stockpiles of ready-to-use vaccines and (2) DHS and USDA determine the reasons for declining agricultural inspections. USDA, DHS, and HHS generally agreed with our recommendations. DOD and EPA made technical comments but took no position on the report's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-214](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-214).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert Robinson, 202-512-3841, [Robinsonr@gao.gov](mailto:Robinsonr@gao.gov).

# HOMELAND SECURITY

## Much Is Being Done to Protect Agriculture from a Terrorist Attack, but Important Challenges Remain

### What GAO Found

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, federal agencies' roles and responsibilities were modified in several ways to help protect agriculture from an attack. First, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 established DHS and, among other things, charged it with coordinating U.S. efforts to protect against agroterrorism. The act also transferred a number of agency personnel and functions into DHS to conduct planning, response, and recovery efforts. Second, the President signed a number of presidential directives that further define agencies' specific roles in protecting agriculture. Finally, Congress passed legislation that expanded the responsibilities of USDA and HHS in relation to agriculture security.

In carrying out these new responsibilities, USDA and other federal agencies have taken a number of actions. The agencies are coordinating development of plans and protocols to better manage the national response to terrorism, including agroterrorism, and, along with several states, have conducted exercises to test these new protocols and their response capabilities. Federal agencies also have been conducting vulnerability assessments of the agriculture infrastructure; have created networks of laboratories capable of diagnosing animal, plant, and human diseases; have begun efforts to develop a national veterinary stockpile that intends to include vaccines against foreign animal diseases; and have created new federal emergency coordinator positions to help states develop emergency response plans for the agriculture sector.

However, the United States still faces complex challenges that limit the nation's ability to respond effectively to an attack against livestock. For example, USDA would not be able to deploy animal vaccines within 24 hours of an outbreak as called for in a presidential directive, in part because the only vaccines currently stored in the United States are for strains of foot and mouth disease, and these vaccines need to be sent to the United Kingdom (U.K.) to be activated for use. There are also management problems that inhibit the effectiveness of agencies' efforts to protect against agroterrorism. For instance, since the transfer of agricultural inspectors from USDA to DHS in 2003, there have been fewer inspections of agricultural products at the nation's ports of entry.

### Burning Carcasses during the 2001 U.K. Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture.