Today, the Committee raises a timely and important issue - food and agriculture security - that we at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) consider essential to our mission, which is to provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management. In light of the recent media inquiries concerning the security of our food and agriculture systems, we appreciate the opportunity to provide you with an update on USDA's Homeland Security-related efforts. As you will see, the success of these efforts is due to and dependent upon the coordinated work of a broad range of Federal, State, local, and private sector partners.

Food and agriculture in the Context of Homeland Security

Agriculture exports this year should reach approximately $59 billion, making 2005 the third highest export sales year ever in our history - and significant to our balance of trade. Our nation's food and fiber system contributes approximately $1.24 trillion dollars, over 12 percent, to our gross domestic product and it employs about 17 percent of our entire workforce.

We face many challenges in protecting this important infrastructure. Our sector is particularly concerned about security because agribusiness is not constrained by political boundaries, and as we all know, diseases and pathogens do not respect state or national borders. The interconnected nature of the global food system is our strength, but it is also a disadvantage in the event of attack or natural disease outbreak. Additionally, one of the agricultural sector's greatest contributions to the quality of life is the fact that products flow quickly through interstate commerce - one of our greatest assets is also one of our greatest concerns because intentionally or unintentionally contaminated products could quickly spread a pest, disease or other agent.

Since September 11, 2001, USDA has made great strides to expand our mission to include security. What has not changed is our conviction that the threat to agriculture is a very real threat. The Department has been working closely with its Federal, State, and local government partners, as well as with industry stakeholders to address these concerns and others via a sector-wide strategy based on White House guidance.

We are relying upon guidance provided in Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-7: Critical Infrastructure Identification, Prioritization, and Protection and in HSPD-9: Defense of U.S. Agriculture and Food to strengthen our preparedness for intentional acts of terrorism against food and agriculture and for enhancements to current programs designed to prevent or control the unintentional introduction of agents, pests, and diseases that could harm our sector.

HSPD-7: Critical Infrastructure Identification, Prioritization, and Protection

USDA has worked in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and our partners at the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (DHHS/FDA) to ensure that we develop a coordinated approach towards implementing HSPD-7 for the food and agriculture sector. Central to this directive, are the requirements for the government to collaborate with the private sector for infrastructure protection purposes and to create an overarching framework and unique sector plans for protecting key assets and

resources.

Since August 2003, USDA, DHS, and DHHS/FDA have worked with Federal, State, local, and private sector participants to establish a formal entity for sharing sensitive information, new policies, best practices and vulnerability assessments on a regular basis to help ensure the protection of the U.S. Food and Agriculture Sector. The government entity, the Food and Agriculture Government Coordinating Council (GCC), is led jointly by DHS, USDA, and DHHS, and includes Federal, State, and local officials. The private sector entity, the Food and Agriculture Sector Coordinating Council (SCC), is comprised of 2 leadership officials and an alternate from each of 7 sub-councils representing the farm-to-table continuum. The Councils regularly hold individual and joint calls to discuss issues of mutual interest such as sector vulnerability assessments and federal research and development plans. As a result of the joint sessions, the Councils create working groups to address specific issues and report recommendations.

HSPD-9: Defense of U.S. Agriculture and Food

To help safeguard our sector from intentional threats, USDA received $328 million from the 2002 Department of Defense and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Recovery from and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States Act to fund homeland security-related programs and initiatives. In addition, the Department through the Administration's FY 06' Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative budget submission has requested $376 million to assist in implementing HSPD-9.

HSPD-9 states that a national policy must include programs addressing:

? Awareness & Warning;

? Vulnerability Assessments;

? Mitigation Strategies;

? Response Planning & Recovery;

? Outreach & Professional Development;

? Research & Development; and

? Coordinated Budgets.

Awareness and Warning

One of USDA's key goals is to expand our surveillance and monitoring systems to provide early detection and tracing of diseases and outbreaks. In addition to expanding our systems, it

is important to integrate them at a higher level - to permit us to notice aberrations across mission areas and across sectors. Intelligence is also essential to awareness and warning so that we are knowledgeable of our enemy's intent and capabilities. We use intelligence to prioritize many surveillance and monitoring activities. Therefore, USDA is forging new relationships to improve upon our preparedness and early warning capabilities.

Animal Health Surveillance Efforts

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is enhancing its animal health surveillance systems by collaborating with its counterparts in the Canadian and Mexican governments. One means of collaboration is via participation on the North American Animal Health Committee, which includes experts from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico considering surveillance methods for detecting a foreign animal disease (FAD) and how to demonstrate that the FAD has been controlled. The experts are preparing a gap analysis describing what we must do in order to return to trading status sooner.

Offshore Pest Surveillance

APHIS currently maintains the Offshore Pest Information System (OPIS). OPIS is a structured, risk-focused process designed to collect, synthesize/analyze, and communicate relevant offshore agricultural pest and disease information. APHIS plant and animal health specialists located overseas monitor and track agricultural pest and disease situations for OPIS reporting. APHIS uses this information to prevent against or prepare for the possible introduction of pests or diseases into the country.

Food Testing for Threat Agents

Early warning of food contamination can save lives. Therefore, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is also focusing upon surveillance to ensure awareness of contamination or an outbreak related to meat, poultry, or egg products as soon as possible. FSIS has expanded its longstanding regulatory sampling program to also test for harmful chemical, biological, and physical hazards in meat, poultry and in egg products. The proportion of samples tested for threat agents is dependent upon the DHS threat condition.

Consumer Complaint Monitoring System

FSIS Consumer Complaint Monitoring System is a national system to monitor and track food-related consumer complaints. This is a real-time, early-warning system of a potential attack on our food supply. This system is an example of building upon existing safety tools to also include security goals.

Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) expansion
Similarly, the Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) program, ECOS, also builds upon an existing program to include new facets to enhance safety or security. Adapting the ECOS to

include a commodity food safety complaint component is the first step in implementing a rapid alert and notification system to reach State and local commodity recipients with up-to-the-minute food safety information. This change will allow local schools to report defective foods in a timely manner and will enable FNS to see trends in complaints and 'connect the dots' should an intentional contamination appear in different places at the same time.

Laboratory Networks

Detecting pests, disease outbreaks or contamination quickly enable us to determine the origin, respond, and mobilize sooner, which reduces the impact of an event. Therefore, our laboratories, are important surveillance tools. To enhance our detection ability and our response capabilities, we have established national networks of federal and state laboratories with the capacity to test animal, plant, and food samples for threat agents in the event of a terrorist attack. USDA has also joined a consortium of laboratory networks including animal, plant, food, public health, defense, and environmental interests.

USDA hosts 3 laboratory networks - the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), the National Plant Diagnostic Network (NPDN) and the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). Note that USDA co-hosts FERN with DHHS/FDA. These networks leverage Federal and State resources to enhance detection of and enable a rapid and sufficient response to food, animal and plant health emergencies. Their main goals are to improve information sharing, surge capacity, and coordinated resource allocation.

To enhance surveillance capabilities, laboratory networks from a variety of Federal Departments have agreed to work cooperatively in an Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks (ICLN.) All have signed onto a Memorandum of Understanding to communicate and cooperate by sharing capabilities, policies, procedures, and approaches for handling laboratory analysis during national emergencies. The consortium also seeks to reduce redundancies among laboratories, identify holes in laboratory capabilities, and to seek solutions to managing these identified issues in the future.

Coordination with the Intelligence Community and Law Enforcement

USDA is expanding its partnerships to include nontraditional partners such as intelligence community members and law enforcement agencies. One way to develop strong relationships is to work side-by-side with these entities. USDA has a senior intelligence advisor assigned to USDA's Homeland Security staff who works primarily on information sharing between the intelligence community and USDA, bolstering that vital connection. In addition, FSIS is providing staff to the National Counter-Terrorism Center.

Vulnerability Assessments

Vulnerability assessments play a key role in helping us to determine and implement the most effective countermeasures to prevent a terrorist attack on our sector.

Interagency Site Assistance Visits

USDA is partnering with the FBI, DHHS/FDA, and DHS to visit a variety of sites within the sector for the purposes of validating previously conducted vulnerability assessments, initiating new assessments, and fostering improved relations among industry, local law enforcement, FBI officials, and USDA, and DHHS/FDA field staff. Findings will also be used to consider mitigation strategies and to populate DHS databases. To ensure appropriate government and industry participation, the effort will be synchronized via the Sector Coordinating Councils.

Additionally, FSIS has completed seven vulnerability assessments for selected domestic and imported food products. And APHIS has completed four assessments for selected agricultural production industries. Both agencies have provided technical expertise concerning the application of the CARVER + Shock assessment tool, threat scenarios, as well as general assistance, to industries conducting their own assessments. These assessments, at the request of industry, have resulted in industry learning more about their vulnerabilities and they provided a forum to consider mitigation strategies. To date, USDA agencies have assisted private sector entities including National Pork Producers Board, the Texas Cattle Feeders Association, and Kraft foods. USDA plans to formalize our agencies' outreach and assistance via the Interagency Site Assistance Visits mentioned previously.

Mitigation Strategies

Early awareness enables a more effective mitigation strategy. Therefore, USDA has the goals of developing animal tracking systems, and expanding screening and inspection procedures, so that we may quickly respond to an attack or naturally occurring incident.

National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

The implementation of a national animal identification and tracking system is a top priority for USDA. Along with our state and industry partners, we're moving forward to implement such a system. NAIS will enhance the speed and efficiency of disease trace backs by standardizing animal movement recordkeeping and using newer technologies. Upon full NAIS implementation, we aim to reach our goal of tracing the movements of all exposed or infected animals entered in the NAIS within 48 hours of a disease diagnosis.

Targeted Screening and Inspection of Imported Food

FSIS works collaboratively with the importing establishment's government and uses a three-part process to verify that other countries' regulatory systems for meat, poultry and egg products are equivalent to that of the U.S. and that products entering the U.S. are safe and wholesome. Each meat, poultry and egg product shipment enters the country under the authority of U.S. Customs and APHIS and is transferred to FSIS where inspectors visually inspect every shipment as well as its accompanying documentation. To aid in security, FSIS established the role of the Import Surveillance Liaison Inspector in 2002. FSIS has hired 22 import surveillance liaison officers who conduct a broad range of surveillance activities at import facilities and serve as liaisons to improve coordination with other agencies concerned

with the safety of imported food products.

Minimizing the Impact of Soybean Rust on the Agriculture Industry

Under APHIS' Strategic Plan to Minimize the Impact of the Introduction and Establishment of Soybean Rust on Soybean Production in the United States, published in November 2004, recovery from the introduction of soybean rust (SBR) introduction will involve a coordinated effort of Federal and State agencies, industry, growers, and crop consultants. The components of recovery include technical support and outreach. The USDA SBR website provides a one-stop source for SBR - including an early warning system designed to provide timely SBR finds and recommendation for control. APHIS led the effort to design a coordinated framework for SBR surveillance and forecasting and is developing a transitional document to transfer leadership of these soybean rust activities to the States.

Preventing Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases from Entering the U.S.

USDA remains committed to maintaining a strong relationship with DHS and working cooperatively to ensure the continued success of agricultural inspection operations at all U.S. ports of entry. For example, APHIS is working with DHS/CBP to establish a quality assurance program for agricultural inspections. This program will ensure the quality and thoroughness of inspections and further facilitate communications.

USDA and DHS are also cooperating on new technologies to enhance border inspection efforts, including development of an automated inspection system to screen manifests electronically and target high-risk cargo; remote digital imaging to quickly identify pests on imported items; and a nationwide database of regulation violators.

Response Planning and Recovery

In the event of an attack or unintentional contamination or outbreak, it is important that we all know our respective roles and responsibilities. The National Response Plan, recently issued by DHS, is integral to ensuring coordinated incident responses.

National Response Plan (NRP) Implementation

USDA staff offices are identifying and preparing revisions to existing regulations, policies and guidance to assure compliance with the NRP. USDA has developed and is delivering NRP training courses for USDA employees and stakeholders.

Under a cooperative agreement, USDA, DHS, DHHS/FDA, and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture formed a working group to develop the Food and Agriculture Annex to NRP and the interagency Food and Agriculture Response Plan that will implement the annex. To date, the working group has finalized the annex, the template for the Plan, and is in the process of populating the Plan.

We're also sharpening USDA's readiness for the Incident Command System. This is a part of a command approach that gives Federal, State and local governments a unified strategy for

working together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents.

National Plant Disease Recovery System (NPDRS)

USDA is working with Federal agencies, State and local governments, and the private sector to develop a system, the NPDRS, capable of responding to a high consequence plant disease. USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has assumed leadership of this effort and initiated a roadmap for implementation. The National Plant Disease Recovery System will implement sufficient control measures and develop resistant seed varieties for economically important crops.

National Veterinary Stockpile (NVS)

APHIS administers the NVS for specific, high threat foreign animal diseases. It is capable of maintaining vaccines for use in the U.S. in the event of a significant foreign animal disease outbreak. APHIS will use the NVS to consider and obtain "ready-to-use" vaccine products. The goal is for NVS to become one component of an overall response planning and recovery effort to provide the best possible protection against an attack on our food and agriculture system.

APHIS has awarded a five-year contract to Fort Dodge Animal Health to develop an avian influenza (AI) vaccine antigen bank for poultry that will house enough frozen antigen to produce up to 10 million doses of vaccine for a variety of AI subtypes. In the event of a high pathogenicity AI (HPAI) outbreak, the frozen antigen would be used to prepare the vaccine for possible use in poultry in order to manage the disease.

Outreach & Professional Development

APHIS is educating its own staff, producers and veterinarians on livestock biosecurity so that they can be prepared to identify and to diagnose infectious diseases. APHIS worked with DHS' Office for Domestic Preparedness to develop an Agriculture Emergency Response Training (AgERT) course in Anniston, Alabama. AgERT prepares APHIS employees to serve as emergency responders. The course is targeted to responding to emergencies in an agricultural setting, but its instruction covers the use of personal protective equipment in all manner of emergencies, including chemical, radiological, and biological emergencies.

Because individual training is not always possible, USDA relies upon CD and web-based training. They are particularly effective mechanisms when the target audiences are widespread and in rural areas where traveling to a training site is difficult.

FSIS is also working with industry organizations to actively seek out opportunities to encourage adoption of food security activities, especially the use of vulnerability assessments and model food security plans. To educate industry on actions that they may take to increase security at their facility or within the system, FSIS issued three sets of voluntary guidance documents:

? Food Security Guidelines for Food Processors, targets slaughter and processing plants. It helps establishments identify ways to strengthen their protection against intentional contamination.

? Safety and Security Guidelines for the Transportation and Distribution of Meat, Poultry and Egg Products. This publication is designed to help facilities and shippers that process or transport meat, poultry and egg products identify potential vulnerabilities in their own operations and address them.

? Food Safety and Food Security: What Consumers Need to Know, outlines practical information for consumers about safe food handling practices, foodborne illness, product recalls, keeping foods safe during an emergency and reporting suspected instances of food tampering.

Using the guidance materials, FSIS prepared a checklist for industry to use to see if they are effectively implementing the voluntary security guidance. In addition, to encourage this kind of voluntary action in protecting the food supply against all threats, FSIS has released four model food security plans for the following four types of facilities: egg processing facilities, meat and poultry processing facilities, slaughterhouses, and import facilities. These plans are based upon the vulnerability assessments and checklists and are geared to serve as models to assist industry in developing their own facility-specific food security plans. To help industry adopt the plans, USDA will reach out to all target establishments with a specific emphasis on smaller companies that might not have the resources to develop their own independent security plans. As part of its outreach program, FSIS is providing training tailored to small and very small plants to encourage industry to adopt food security plans. While these guidelines are voluntary, FSIS strongly urges all establishments operating under Federal and State inspection programs to incorporate these security procedures.

Agriculture Transportation Security Guidance

USDA and the American Trucking Association developed a voluntary security guidebook and risk assessment tool for use by truck company owners and drivers to enhance security from external threats, including terrorism, and to protect trucking facilities and vehicles.

Externships and Fellowships

The field of food and agriculture security is relatively new, and therefore has few experts. Ensuring a competent and robust workforce of the future is important to the security of the sector in the long term. USDA has a number of initiatives to encourage study in this field. APHIS is collaborating with Veterinary Schools to establish externship programs between senior veterinary students and various Units within the Agency's Veterinary Services program. In addition, FSIS currently employs several post-graduate fellows who are engaged full-time in bioterrorism and vulnerability assessment activities.

Research and Development

USDA is constructing a world-class animal disease bio-containment facility for research and diagnostics in Ames, Iowa that will house the Centers for Animal Health which are the National Animal Disease Center of ARS, the National Veterinary Services Laboratory of APHIS and the Center for Veterinary Biologics of APHIS.

USDA is developing a comprehensive suite of rapid diagnostic tests to detect and identify pathogens within hours that pose the greatest threat to U.S. livestock. Rapid detection tests for Foot and Mouth disease, Classical Swine Fever, Avian Influenza, and Newcastle disease have been transferred to APHIS for use in the National Animal Health Laboratory Network.

USDA Research -Crop Disease Detection and Food Defense
ARS scientists working on crop diseases have developed rapid tests for plant threat agents. These highly sensitive and accurate tests provide diagnosticians with an accurate means to detect pathogens as part of a national surveillance system. The rapid test for soybean rust (SBR) played an important role in the detection of SBR, in following its spread, and in the application of technology to reduce the impact of SBR.

Future ARS research will ensure that disease resistant varieties of plants and crops are continuously developed and made available to farmers and producers, will develop real-time, field deployable surveillance and detection methodologies and coordinate the validation process and will determine how the environment affects the establishment, spread and persistence of a threat in an agricultural context.
ARS has worked closely with USDA agencies and other Departments to address research and development needs resulting from vulnerability assessment findings. Methods were successfully developed to detect B. anthracis in milk on the farm, during transport/handling and at the processing plant to assure biosecurity.

Modeling and Mapping Development

The Economic Research Service (ERS) developed the Geo-Spatial Economic Analysis (GSEA) System to serve as a platform for collaborative analysis of the economic consequences of natural and man-made threats to food and agricultural industries. The GSEA system can be used to examine the economic impact of events that disrupt the production, processing, distribution or consumption of food and agricultural products. The key to this system is the ability to leverage existing expertise and analytical capacity at ERS by identifying and filling data gaps, integrating the results of dissimilar economic analyses and developing interfaces with plant and animal epidemiology models

Coordinated Budget

HSPD-9 directed a coordinated budget submission by USDA and DHHS/FDA to ensure collaboration during program and budget planning. USDA coordinated with DHHS/FDA to submit the Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative (FADI) for fiscal years 2005 and 2006.

Closing

Mr. Chairman, thank you once again for holding this important hearing. The Department looks forward to working with the Committee in continuing to develop programs and initiatives to help enhance our nation's agriculture and food systems. I would now be pleased to take any questions you or other members may have.