

Bio-Security: Is the U.S. Agriculture Industry Prepared to Protect Itself?

Introduction:

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to address the Senate Agriculture Committee today regarding the agriculture industry's ability to address bio-security issues.

My name is Lew Gardner. I own and operate a family dairy farm in Galeton, Pennsylvania. Today, I'm here in my capacity as a Pennsylvania dairy farmer. I also serve as the Chair of the Northeast Council of Dairy Farmers of America (DFA). DFA's Northeast Council has 1,700 dairy farmers who produce approximately 3 billion pounds of milk annually. In addition to my role as DFA's Northeast Council Chair, I am a Vice- Chair on DFA's Corporate Board. I am also a member of the Board of Directors of the National Milk Producers Federation and the National Dairy Board.

I want to thank Senator Santorum for his interest in bio-security and for holding this hearing today in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg. We must continue to raise the awareness of this important topic in the interest of maintaining the health and safety of our nation's livestock industry and the consumer's confidence in our food supply.

The safety and security of the milk supply is of the utmost importance to the U.S. dairy industry and to DFA. Through its own initiatives, and in conjunction with industry partners, DFA has been involved in a cooperative effort to address challenges in protecting the nation's milk supply from a variety of threats.

For the past three years, the dairy industry has been working closely with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other government departments to further safeguard the milk supply from potential threats.

Biosecurity is an important aspect of insuring a safe food supply and protecting animal health. Keeping food products wholesome and of the highest quality is important for the health and welfare of consumers. The ability to provide safe food helps to insure consumer demand, therefore helping to insure the profitability of farmers. Healthy and productive animals benefit farmers and enhance farm profitability and viability as well.

DFA's Farm to Market Bio-Security Activities:

As part of this ongoing work, DFA has taken a number of measures to secure the milk supply throughout the production and processing chain.

? Over the past three years, DFA led an effort between dairy farmers and processors to create and implement a milk tanker seal program. The new standards -- adopted by the vast majority of the industry -- call for milk tankers to be sealed following cleaning at their delivery point and again after loading milk from farms. The seals are only to be broken once the milk is delivered at a processing plant, and any unauthorized efforts to remove the seal on the tanker will result in the milk being scrutinized for tampering.

? During the same period, DFA endorsed emergency warehouse and milking room procedures as well as emergency guidelines for an "on farm" field staff protocol in the event of a herd health crisis.

? Over the past three years DFA redeveloped its crisis management plans, created a special crisis management web site with unilateral tools for team use, and has formed crisis teams at all levels (from farm to plant) in an effort to be pro-active, trained and aware of potential security threats from farm to processor to customer.

? DFA's manufacturing plants are registered to the Food & Drug Administration's database, and have completed Operational Risk Management (ORM) studies. Plants have secured entry systems, restricted access to the plant floor, implemented restricted access visitor and contractor programs and revised receiving and shipping programs. Packaging operations are automated and enclosed. Product packaging is generally tamper-evident.

? DFA has endorsed and published information about dairy farmers' use of bio security guidelines as recommended by the National Milk Producers Federation and the International Dairy Foods Association.

? DFA is in the process of launching an aggressive dairy farmer awareness and education program called "MySecurity." The goal of DFA's information campaign is to make dairy farmer members more aware of security and safety steps they can use "on farm" to increase consumer confidence about the security of farms, bulk tanks and milk supply from farm to market.

? Components of the initial MySecurity rollout kits

- o Multilingual "Restricted Access" signs are being delivered to members' farms

- o Multilingual "DFA Guide to Farm Biosecurity" wall charts

- o Individual farm "Emergency Action Plan" templates with phone contact information for all agencies/personnel

- o "Keep America's Food and Agriculture Safe "USDA bulletins (2) that highlight farm biosecurity issues

- o Access to web based information through a secure connection for members to receive updates of farm security related material

All members will receive quarterly newsletters and security updates through email/fax/regular mail.

? Primary responsibility for DFA's interactions with the food security community as well as coordination of the development, and implementation of its internal "farm to fork" security initiative(s) has been placed in a newly established position at its corporate headquarters

location.

? DFA is a member of INFRAGARD, a partnership of industry and the FBI to share information through secure email sites and promote participation in local, state, and national chapters of the organization to interact with those involved in the national security effort. A more agriculture specific group, to be known as AGGARD, is being created and DFA will participate in that effort.

? DFA is an active participant in the National Milk Producers Federation Foot and Mouth Disease research working group. This effort involves meetings of the various agencies that will be involved in oversight of any intentional/natural animal/milk related disease outbreak and is equally focused on plans to insure continuing milk marketing avenues in the event of animal quarantine operations.

? DFA has created a signage program and specific wall chart/handout material to be used by members that have visitors to their farming operations.

? DFA has created a global positioning satellite (GPS) location database for members, haulers, DFA plants, and customer plants along with corresponding milk production/capacity information so that electronically maps and/or area quarantine statistics are available.

Industry Initiatives:

Dairy farmers closely monitor their herds to ensure their health and well-being. Many producers have implemented recommended measures for security and bio-security. These measures include but are not limited to the following recommendations:

? Sealing and locking milk bulk storage tanks

? Having a combined entrance and exit for the farm with the farm name and contact information posted

? Restricting access to areas where milk, feed, farm chemicals and animal health products are stored

? Restricting and monitoring access to buildings and grounds through the use of fences, security lighting, alarms and appropriate lighting and signage

? Keeping records on visitors and deliveries and restricting their access to appropriate areas on the farm

? Maintaining a healthy herd through proper feeding, housing and care

? Purchasing healthy animals and quarantining them before they are exposed to the herd

? Require livestock haulers and dealers to disinfect equipment before entering farm complex

? Carefully screening job applicants, including background checks

? Create a crisis response plan

These voluntary recommendations are in the best interest of the dairy industry but one must use common sense before considering making them mandatory. 95 % of Pennsylvania's dairy farms have less than 100 cows. 25% of Pennsylvania's farms are owned and operated by Amish and Mennonite farmers, many of whom do not use electricity. In addition to working through the practicality of many of these recommendations, there will be a considerable cost to implement them. This cost cannot be borne entirely by dairy farmers.

The implementation of these guidelines and practices must be uniformly applied on a national basis and be in concert with current state regulations. For example, one could not require that milkhouses and bulk tanks be locked in Pennsylvania, while the U.S. Public Health requires them to be open and accessible for random U. S. Public Health rating inspections. If a rating officer was denied access to a farm facility, the farm would score a zero, possibly resulting in a bulk tank unit losing its right to ship milk under the PMO.

Dairy product safety and security doesn't conclude with good bio-security practices on the farm. Dairy industry partners continue to work closely with Federal and State regulators to develop and implement good bio-security practices, to the extent that the U.S. milk supply and dairy products are among the safest and most highly regulated foods in the world. The U.S. dairy industry utilizes a number of practices and regulations to ensure dairy product safety in the food supply as follows:

? The PMO is a set of requirements that address milk production, hauling, pasteurization, product safety, equipment sanitation and labeling.

? Every tank load of milk entering dairy processing plants is strictly tested for animal drug residues and quality. Any tanker that tests positive for animal drug residues is disposed of immediately, never reaching the consumer.

? HACCP is a structured and scientific process used throughout the industry to help ensure food safety.

? New standards for sealing milk tankers have been implemented; ensuring that unauthorized opening of tankers is immediately evident.

? Proactive steps to increase awareness among employees about security measures at the farm and in processing facilities are being implemented.

? Dairy processing plants are continuing to implement entry security systems, employee screening programs and restricted access to the plants operations.

? Packaging operations are automated, enclosed and secure.

The industry remains committed to security and safety and regularly evaluates the milk supply

chain to keep America's milk supply safe.

Additional Work Remains:

While much has already been done, there remains a great deal left to do:

? The U.S. Animal Identification Plan needs to be implemented as soon as possible. Several breed associations, National DHIA and the National Milk Producers Federation have joined forces calling for the implementation of the plan prior to USDA recommendations. IDairy is calling upon Congress and USDA to provide the necessary resources and leadership to accomplish a timely implementation of this plan. A mandatory animal ID program provides a critical link in insuring healthy livestock and maintaining consumer confidence in our nation's food supply.

? Dairy farmers must recognize the need for the implementation of better bio-security practices on their farms. They must understand that these changes are in their best interest and that government resources will be available in part to support them. It would be helpful to dairy farmers if materials are developed that would help elevate the level of awareness at the farm level.

? National agricultural bio-security regulations must be carefully coordinated by one federal agency in order to insure that all federal regulatory partners are working together in a clear and concise manner. It's imperative that federal and state regulators understand the agriculture industry and are sensitive to providing practical solutions to improve bio-security protocols in the dairy industry. Providing spokesperson training to those who will be in positions of decision making and media interactions will help in the dissemination of a clear and concise message to consumers farmers and processors in the event of a bio-security related incident.

? The resources necessary to implement additional bio-security practices on the farm must be supported with Federal and State funds. These new regulations will be expensive to implement and the costs cannot be borne entirely by the farmers

? Federal Regulatory Agencies should support and recognize State regulations that are already in place and achieving the necessary results.

Conclusion:

The U.S. dairy industry has been working together for the past several years to improve bio-security practices on the farm and in processing plants. Keeping the dairy industry, it's livestock and products safe and secure has always been important to dairy farmers. Today's environment requires farmers, haulers and processors to re-evaluate their production practices to prevent the intentional introduction of livestock diseases and product tampering.

If dairy farmers want to maintain their markets and consumer confidence, we have to make farms and plants as secure as possible. We will be successful if we continue to coordinate our efforts and identify the resources necessary to successfully develop and implement good bio-

security practices for the U.S. dairy industry.