

PennAg Industries Association appreciates the invitation and the opportunity to provide comments to this panel on the important subject of agriculture biosecurity. PennAg represents more than 600 companies that provide the inputs and services to the more than 50,000 farms in this state.

Pennsylvania is a leader nationally in the area of biosecurity on our poultry farms. After a devastating avian influenza outbreak in the early 1980's, Pennsylvania's poultry industry began an aggressive effort to prevent future outbreaks and minimize their impact if they did occur.

All commercial poultry operations in the state have been included in a data base that can be utilized by the industry, and by our regulatory partners in the USDA and the PDA, in the event of a disease outbreak. This data base has been in use now for more than a decade and has been very effective in identifying neighboring flocks to a poultry flock that has been diagnosed with AI.

It is important to note that the database is maintained by one of our partners at an academic institution thereby enabling us to maintain confidentiality of this information, which is an area of major concern to farmers.

In addition to the excellent database that we have available, the second component of the Pennsylvania program is the surveillance program practiced by our poultry industry. Each year poultry producers send over 250,000 routine samples to our laboratories for diagnosis. This routine surveillance program has enabled us to identify a disease outbreak at its earliest stages and allows us to quarantine, alert neighboring poultry operations, elevate biosecurity operations, and depopulate a flock to control the disease when that is the recommended course of action.

The Pennsylvania program is nationally recognized and several national organizations, specifically the National Chicken Council and the United Egg Producers, have asked for information about our program so they can assist other states in developing similar programs.

We would encourage the US Congress to consider the following items in addressing the issue of biosecurity and developing other initiatives which provide financial support to the agricultural community.

1) Increase the diagnostic laboratory capability in states with large concentrations of poultry and livestock. We encourage the federal government to provide additional financial support for the development of a BSL-3 Laboratory at one of our Pennsylvania research institutions so that the facility can be used for both research and for routine sampling and diagnosis. States with these large concentrations of animals must be self sufficient when it comes to rapid diagnosis. They can not rely on neighboring states or the federal laboratory system if diagnosis is to be prompt and the response rapid.

2) We believe every state should be encouraged to develop a premise identification program along the lines of the program Pennsylvania has developed for the poultry industry. However, the issue of information confidentiality must be addressed when undertaking this effort. Only if the information is confidential will government be able to develop and maintain a database that

is accurate. Industry cooperation will be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain if confidentiality is not assured.

3) Agroterrorism has been occurring with increasing frequency. Animal rights groups have been breaking into research facilities and commercial poultry operations for the purpose of releasing animals and filming the contents of the facilities. These activities are strict violations of the basic tenets of biosecurity and place the owners of these operations in jeopardy of having disease introduced to their operations.

As an example, one of our PennAg members experienced agro-terrorism in the fall of 2005. In this incident, uninvited visitors broke into three different poultry facilities late at night and filmed the inside of these poultry houses. In doing so, they violated every tenet of strict biosecurity.

To address this problem we recommend that the Federal statutes be strengthened. Federal laws should be such that violations are recognized as a national threat to our country and to those that produce the foodstuffs to feed our population.

I also want to take this opportunity to commend the FBI for its ongoing investigations into this, and other, terrorism incidents in Pennsylvania. They are doing a great job with the existing statutes but would also benefit if the statutes are strengthened.

4) We recommend that a significant portion of any federal appropriation for addressing the bird flu threat be devoted to field work and adequately preparing the agricultural community to prevent a bird flu outbreak or to promptly contain it should it ever occur. While using a portion of the funds to stockpile serum to be used in the event of an outbreak is appropriate, funding should also be available to provide proper biosecurity signage at farms, compile a database of all animal and poultry operations, and properly equip our diagnostic laboratories to meet the challenges of a bird flu outbreak.

While I am on the subject of bird flu, I want to take the time to remind this committee and the general public that it is important to recognize why bird flu incidences have occurred in Asia and Eastern Europe. Most of the countries which have reported outbreaks have humans and birds and animals cohabiting in the same house or in very close proximity. These birds and animals run loose and, if they are carrying a virus, they are spreading it rapidly throughout the house of its owners and throughout the neighborhood.

One of the many advantages of modern confinement animal and poultry operations is that the animals are confined in environmentally controlled barns thereby minimizing the risk for infection. Confinement also eliminates the potential for wild birds and animals to spread the disease from flock to flock since the domesticated animals are isolated from the wild ones.

We submit that those that oppose our modern methods of animal production do not fully understand the multiple benefits of this approach.

5) One of the most frequent disruptions of poultry production in Pennsylvania is the problem associated with Live Bird Markets. These markets in some of our major cities are reservoirs for

disease which can be easily spread back to the farms that are supplying the birds because cages and transport vehicles are not properly cleaned and disinfected. We encourage the USDA to expand its efforts to inspect and monitor these live bird markets in our major metropolitan areas.

6) Finally, while most of our comments and recommendations are centered on our animal and poultry agriculture, one remaining issue that also requires increased attention, is our agri-chemical industry. This industry, which PennAg also represents, provides the pesticides and fertilizers to those in production agriculture. Agri-chemical facilities are also subject to the threat of terrorism. In this instance also, we believe that the federal statutes should be strengthened so as to discourage terrorism at these facilities which are so important to the success of production agriculture. Penalties should be increased to minimize or eliminate the potential for terrorism against this industry.

PennAg appreciates the opportunity to offer these comments on behalf of our 600 plus member companies who are the support and service sector of the number one industry in Pennsylvania, agriculture. I would be happy to respond to your questions.

Thank you.