

(Submitted to be included in the hearing Record)

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's 37,500 members, I want to thank Senator Santorum for the leadership in organizing this event and for the invitation to offer comment. My participation today at the annual convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation prevents me from being with you at this hearing.

Pennsylvania's farm families believe that the protection of our nation's food supply needs to be a significant priority for our country and Commonwealth. Farmers have made great strides in implementing on-farm bio-security measures and providing information to animal health professionals to ward off potential bio-security threats. Our state government and research institutions have excelled in providing factual and timely alerts on disease outbreaks.

However, more can be done to expand and strengthen bio-security on Pennsylvania farms. First, producer education must be continued to ensure bio-security measures are implemented effectively at the farm level. Secondly, Congress should enact stronger penalties for those who purposely trespass on animal confinement facilities, which greatly increases the risk of spreading disease. Thirdly, we need to better inform consumers to avoid needless concerns that affect their decisions regarding the consumption of our food products.

These and other points are expanded upon in the written testimony provided for the hearing. Thank you again for convening this important event.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Testimony on Bio-security  
by Carl T. Shaffer, President

On behalf of our 37,500 farm family members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The protection of our nation's food supply is a top priority for Pennsylvania farmers, the commonwealth and the nation. Senator Santorum's decision to hold this hearing today reflects the importance of this issue. The future well-being of our nation is vitally dependent upon continuation of a safe and readily available food supply. Recent acts of foreign and domestic terrorism, and serious outbreaks of disease in foreign lands, highlight the vulnerability of our food supply if effective measures to protect our farms and farm products are not implemented.

Farmers practice bio-security daily on their farming operations. Some bio-security measures are as simple as knowing the agribusiness professionals who stop by their farms regularly while also realizing when an unknown individual is visiting unannounced. Other bio-security measures are standard procedure such as showering before entering a sow farrowing barn or wearing suits and boots before entering a laying hen facility. Dairy facilities have foot-washing stations for their employees and hoof-washing stations for the cows to protect from diseases. In fact, bio-security is becoming common practice in Pennsylvania. Many industry professionals realize its importance and know not to enter more than one facility in a given day to not spread disease.

However, diseases and threats to our food supply change daily. Therefore, our protocols and technology must adapt. More can be done to improve bio-security on Pennsylvania farms. First, producer education must be continued to ensure bio-security measures are implemented effectively at the farm level. Producer education is a continuing process. Organizations such as Farm Bureau and other producer groups, as well as Cooperative Extension, currently provide education and information about the importance of bio-security on farms.

Unfortunately, purposeful threats to our industry are much more difficult to deal with. For example, in the poultry industry there is a recent concern of intentional or accidental contamination of flocks through exposure of unauthorized people entering poultry facilities. Secondly, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau urges Congress to enact stronger penalties for those who purposely trespass on animal confinement facilities, which greatly increases the risk of spreading disease. The recent illegal entry of an animal rights group into a Pennsylvania poultry operation with cameras that documented their own trespass on a local television news cast illustrates how such activities can dangerously breaching biosecurity measures. Furthermore, such behavior should be admonished by the news media rather than be used as a news account that advances the group's radical agenda.

Thirdly, we need to better inform consumers to avoid needless concerns that affect their decisions regarding the consumption of our food products. Farmers provide safe, quality products to our consumers and that message needs to be heard and understood. This can be accomplished through stronger relationships with media and industry. For example, the recent concern over the introduction of avian influenza (AI) into the U.S. has caused consumer concern. The U.S. has many safeguards in place to detect and eradicate AI. No poultry infected or suspect to be infected with AI are processed for sale as raw meat in the United States. The United States imports very little poultry, which significantly reduces the possibility of exposing our industry to Bird Flu. Furthermore, virtually all of the chicken and turkey sold in the U.S. is produced here. Our consumers in the United States have little chance of coming across meat from an AI infected bird. Also, there is no danger of acquiring AI from properly cooked food.

The Pennsylvania Farm Bureau supports an overall greater commitment of resources from all levels of government to help us protect our food supply from acts of bioterrorism. While we believe Pennsylvania is on course in maintaining and further developing such safeguards, we need to continue the awareness and funding levels to ensure that our system can meet current and future demands. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.