

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, and the entire agricultural community, thank you for choosing the 90th Pennsylvania Farm Show as the venue for your Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Research, Nutrition and General Legislation Field Hearing. The Farm Show is an excellent backdrop to symbolize the diversity and importance of agriculture to our economy, and why it is so important to address the bio-security needs of this industry. As is evident this week, agriculture impacts many people, not just the farming community. And it is this premise that has guided our bio-security planning efforts. I am very pleased that your distinguished Sub-Committee is taking the time to investigate and study how Pennsylvania is successfully implementing bio-security measures to prepare and protect our agricultural system, and American citizens.

Thanks to Governor Rendell, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture participated in the 2003 Homeland Security Office of Domestic Preparedness State Homeland Security Assessment and Strategy Program, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. Pennsylvania was one of six states that included agriculture as one of the disciplines to be evaluated. The Agriculture Assessment reflects the Commonwealth's recognition of their discipline as representative of the largest industry in Pennsylvania and subsequent need to ensure bio-security prevention, response and recovery capabilities. That has guided how we have approached our own programming and partnerships with our federal partners. It has also helped to shape our federal grant requests, aiming to target available funding to specific needs.

Agriculture in Pennsylvania is responsible for approximately \$4.5 billion of cash farm receipts and nearly \$45 billion in economic activity, making good bio-security planning essential. The economy of Pennsylvania and the nation is very vulnerable to any major disease outbreak due to the closing of export markets. Even a small, rapidly contained outbreak of a disease can cause the loss of millions in export dollars. In 2003, a single case of mad cow disease led to billions of dollars in lost exports for the United States. An extended or widespread outbreak of a disease in the United States would bring on economic disaster.

To protect public health, food supply, and the economy of Pennsylvania and the United States, rapid efficient containment and eradication of diseases or containment of animals, plants and the food supply is vital and has been the driving force behind our preparations at the Department of Agriculture. Laboratory diagnostics capabilities are a vital part of rapid disease identification, which acts as a trigger for disease containment and eradication efforts. The infrastructure for developing response capabilities for agricultural emergencies must be in place before a response to an actual emergency is necessary.

In Pennsylvania, we are very fortunate to have excellent food, animal and plant laboratories that form the basis of our response capabilities. Framed around this basis has been our request for federal assistance that has included updated laboratory information management systems and improved diagnostic capabilities for the Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory System; a complete rebuild of our food safety and inspection reporting system; improved diagnostic capabilities for our plant protection systems and continued educational and training initiatives for members of the animal response teams as part of the Pennsylvania Animal Response Team (PASART). This comprehensive approach is in recognition that our nation has only a 3-5 day

supply of food on hand at any one time; if an incident involving any part of agriculture is not controlled or contained rapidly and efficiently, we as a nation could face significant human and economic hardship. The Commonwealth has worked cooperatively with the many federal, state and private partners to assess, plan and train for bio-security disasters.

Through my comments today, I will provide an overview of how Governor Rendell's multi-agency approach to bio-security has positioned Pennsylvania as a leader in both planning and preparedness for the operational responses required for accidental or terroristic threats to agriculture. I appreciate that one of the goals of this field hearing is to better understand Pennsylvania's ability to coordinate research and develop an integrated strategy to protect the industry from accidental or deliberate pathogen or biological agent introduction. Let me provide a few examples of what we are doing.

First, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Centers For Disease Control, we worked to develop a Food Safety and Security System. The new food safety computer system--the Digital Health Department--will enhance the safety and security of the Commonwealth food supply by enhancing communication ability, information analysis and sharing, and uniformity and continuity of those agencies involved in food safety. All Department of Agriculture regulated food industries, from restaurants to food manufacturers, to warehouses will have inspectional, licensing, and contact information housed within one system. And the ability will exist to integrate all local and county health departments into a statewide information and communications network, ultimately providing a statewide database of all regulated food industry and regulatory authorities.

Second, in partnership with PEMA and USDA, we developed a Laboratory Information Management System and an Infrastructure for Identification of Animal Premises Database. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services completed a project to allow consolidation of the Bureau's databases and a link to the Pennsylvania Agriculture Department Laboratory System--LIMS has been completed. This new system allows the Department to share its diagnostic information with state and federal veterinary and medical officials. Also it sets the stage for Pennsylvania's participation in the voluntary national animal identification program.

Third, in partnership with PEMA, we worked on upgrading the plant pathology lab for testing of crop disease organisms. Plant disease-causing microbes could be used to reduce food supplies and to disrupt trade in agricultural commodities that would impact national economics. Historically, plant diseases have caused serious damage to the U.S. economy. Some examples of these diseases include wheat rust, corn leaf blight, plum pox, potato mop top virus, citrus canker and karnal bunt on wheat. USDA has identified the listed several plant diseases and toxins that pose a severe threat to a number of crops.

Fourth, the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team is a coordinated effort between several governmental, corporate, and private entities dedicated to the preparation, planning, response, and recovery of animal emergencies in Pennsylvania. The team's mission is to develop and implement procedures and train participants to facilitate a safe, environmentally sound and efficient response to animal emergencies on the local, county, state, and federal level. PASART has also played a leadership role at the national level, as its Executive Director, Joel Hersh,

helped facilitate a national animal response team dialogue which included representatives from a number of states, as well as representatives of the Department of Homeland Security and USDA, Animal Care Division. PASART and its volunteers at the county level, known as CARTS, as critical to preparedness efforts for our state. The expertise provided, through trained volunteers, will be critical to our mitigating the effects of any disaster, including those caused by terrorism. Funds for SART type programs needs to be included as a line item in any federal preparedness funding allocations.

Fifth, PDA conducted an Avian Influenza discussion-based exercise on December 14, 2005. The exercise participants include personnel from: University of Pennsylvania (PADLS), PSU (PADLS), Bureau of Animal Health Regional and HQ staff, the PA Veterinary Laboratory, PDA EPLO's, PDA EOC personnel, PDA Administrative Services, PA Dept of Health, PEMA, FBI, USDA-APHIS & PennAg Industries. The scenario that PDA exercised began at initial detection of a suspected highly pathogenic AI virus on a fictional large-scale Lancaster County layer poultry operation and concluded once the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) determined the AI strain was H5N1 (Once H5N1 is determined the exercise will conclude)

The objectives of the exercise were to: (1) Detect, contain and indemnify the virus utilizing the AI Response Plan; (2) Assess internal and external resource coordination and notification protocols; (3) Implement and utilize the Incident Command Structure and discuss private and public sector coordination; (4) Discuss media control. An After Action Report (AAR) was completed and the following issues were identified as areas to improve or develop:

1. Lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and training for our responders to adequately protect themselves from an AI that would be dangerous to humans.
2. Improve the notification process in an AI incident.
3. Improve our logistical capabilities (e.g. more contracts, mass depopulation capabilities, manpower resources, agreements with other agencies for additional response efforts & resources).

From the exercise, the evaluation team and members of PEMA recommended PDA explore the possibility of creating trained and equipped response teams that would be fully capable of responding to any type of dangerous animal or emergency disaster that affects agriculture and our emergency response expectations (BPI, Food Safety or Animal Health).

Sixth, Governor Rendell and the Pennsylvania General Assembly have approved the construction of a BSL-3 lab as an annex to the Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory at PDA. This additional capacity will allow Pennsylvania to leverage the current investment made by the state for animal health, rapidly respond to the diagnostic needs of our farmers, extend the USDA partnership and more importantly protect our citizenry. This investment will be very beneficial to protecting Pennsylvania's economy.

Finally, the recognition of the possibility that accidental and intentional introductions may occur has emphasized the need to develop rapid response capabilities in order to protect natural and cultivated plant resources from plant pests. For the purpose of this document the term "rapid response" is defined to mean a series of coordinated activities involving one or more organizations that are initiated by the discovery of a plant pest of concern. Rapid response

activities consist of a number of components including detection, accurate identification and/or diagnostics, and mitigation activities.

It is unlikely that any single agency or organization has both the legal authority and a sufficient level of resources to conduct an effective plant pest mitigation response without the involvement and support of others. It is important for all involved to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in a rapid response situation. Generally, a state or federal plant pest regulatory agency will have to be the lead agency in conducting any response activity because of the legal responsibilities assigned to that agency.

Accurate and timely plant pest identification and/or diagnostic support is critical to developing and implementing effective mitigation activities. Therefore, it will be especially important for agencies that have skills in this area be included in the planning and implementation of mitigation activities. Organizations with plant pest identification and/or diagnostic capabilities may be one of the first to receive samples or initial indication of a potential problem. It is essential that this information be provided to regulatory agencies as soon as possible so that effective evaluation and mitigation activities can be initiated.

There are so many other initiatives I could highlight--some small--others large, but all essential to protecting Pennsylvania's health and safety. Everything we have done has been a collaborative effort among private, federal, local and state partners. While we have made great progress, there are several things the federal government could work with us and be helpful on. They include:

1. Support for BSL-3 Lab Annex--Additional federal funding would enable Pennsylvania to position itself as a primary provider of bio-security laboratory capacity for the east coast of the United States.
2. Funding to extend the Garrison system statewide--This would enable Pennsylvania to provide a seamless system for food security to each and every town, hamlet and city in Pennsylvania.
3. PPE equipment and infrastructure--This equipment would finish preparedness planning in the case of an accidental or terroristic incident on a farm.
4. Additional professional staff--Federal funding at the personnel level has enabled Pennsylvania to excel at many of its program and planning levels. Further support would allow us to build upon those successes, and include new areas of bio-security preparedness and planning.
5. Ag Research and Funding--A strong research program fueled by adequate funding is the building block to protecting American homeland security. Research drives many of the successes Pennsylvania has had with our projects and regulatory responsibilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Sub-Committee today. I am hopeful my comments will give you a well-rounded view of what Pennsylvania has accomplished and what our future needs are. Thank you and please enjoy your stay at the Farm Show.