

Testimony of  
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Before the Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans  
Affairs, and International Relations  
Committee on Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives

June 11, 2002

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) on the establishment of a Department of Homeland Security.

APHIS is a multipurpose organization with one main mission—protecting America's agriculture. Our main activities are designed to keep foreign pests and diseases out of the United States; to monitor and manage agricultural pests and diseases already existing in the United States; and to resolve and manage trade issues related to animal and plant health. The functions we perform are an important part of the Federal Government's efforts to provide the Nation with safe and affordable food and to defend against agricultural terrorism.

As we all know, the tragic events of September 11 forever changed our country, and for APHIS, they forever changed the context in which we do our work. Whereas in the past our attentions have primarily focused on the accidental introduction of foreign pests and diseases, today we face a no-longer abstract threat of intentional introduction of organisms that could disrupt American agricultural production, erode confidence in our Nation's food supply, and

de-stabilize the American economy.

The President's proposal for a new Department of Homeland Security will bolster our coordination, planning, response, and management capabilities. Since the security and protection of our Nation is of the highest priority, it is of the utmost importance that all biological and agricultural terrorism activities be consolidated into a single Department focused on homeland security. Therefore, we fully support the President's plan for the creation of this new Department.

It is critical that Government agencies continue to work together to protect America from terrorists. In particular, we must protect our food and agriculture supply against any threat that could harm consumers or our farm sector. While we have a strong system of protections at our borders and ports of entry that helps prevent the entry of agricultural pests and diseases, it is critical in this new age of threats that we enhance the protection of America's food supply.

Until this new Department can be established, USDA will continue to work closely with the Office of Homeland Security, as we have since it was established in October 2001. USDA's Homeland Security Council, headed by Deputy Secretary Jim Moseley, will continue to coordinate USDA's efforts to meet pressing security needs. The Council has been and will continue working with the Office of Homeland Security and will provide assistance and staff to address critical agricultural issues.

APHIS has also been working intensely to coordinate with other Agencies as part of our safeguarding activities and will continue to do so. We have always thought that one of the most fundamental bases of the safeguarding/border inspection system is APHIS' close cooperation with the U.S. Customs Service and other Federal inspection agencies in relation to imported cargo and international passengers. Although a high level of cooperation existed even prior to September 11, 2001, since that time, APHIS and these agencies have significantly strengthened their communications and direct cooperation with each other. For example, APHIS officials now participate directly with Customs in its emergency situation facility and also in a major effort to enhance the availability of all cargo manifest information to identify cargo containers as they are used in commerce throughout the world. However, consolidating homeland security functions into one Department will ensure better communication and coordination leading to improved effectiveness. We look forward to working together with the other homeland security agencies as members of the same Department.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to take any questions that you may have.