



Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism, Part II: Assessing Federal Government Efforts

February 11, 2026

Statement for the Record

Matt Allen

Director, Office of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Before the

United States House of Representatives

Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology

Good afternoon, Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Matt Allen, and I have the privilege of leading the USDA Office of Homeland Security. Our six divisions coordinate across the Department to mitigate risk and provide safeguards to USDA personnel and information by leading Government-wide initiatives and championing USDA's equities in homeland and national security. To protect U.S. agriculture, OHS executes these critical Departmental functions across our emergency operations, continuity of operations, personnel security, classified communications, safety of ionizing radiation, and homeland and national security policy, planning, and preparedness activities for USDA. I very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss the important topic of farm security as National Security with you today.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture was established in 1862. Our seal states "Agriculture is the Foundation of Manufacturing and Commerce." This is as true today as it was then. Agriculture contributes over \$1.5 trillion to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product each year. It underpins our society and is one of the most important pillars that feeds, fuels, and clothes the entire world.

This past summer, the Department launched the National Farm Security Action Plan: a first of its kind comprehensive strategy to acknowledge agriculture as key pillar of national security. This plan focuses on protecting U.S. farmland from foreign adversaries, strengthening food supply chains, ending fraud in nutrition programs, safeguarding plant and animal health, promoting "America First" in all USDA programs, and bolstering research security. It includes key elements like tougher AFIDA enforcement for foreign land purchases and working with our Federal partners like U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to ensure that pests and pathogens don't enter the United States, threatening our herds and crops.

The National Farm Security Action Plan enables USDA to begin this critical work to address the imperative for agriculture security in America. This Action Plan serves as the launching point for USDA to work in continued unison with governmental and other partners to fully integrate agriculture into the broader national security enterprise in the coming months and years. Working together, we can and must protect and expand the resilience and durability of the U.S. food supply and all associated value chains.

Continuing the implementation of the Farm Security Action Plan, in January, USDA launched a new online portal to streamline reporting of transactions involving U.S. agricultural land by foreign persons, which can include businesses and governments, under the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978 (AFIDA). The new online portal is part of a broader effort to strengthen AFIDA enforcement and protect American farmland. This online portal will enable USDA to better share data with our interagency partners, address a GAO audit finding, as well as reduce the burden on filers, streamlining the process for electronic submission and retention of AFIDA disclosure records.

In addition to the National Farm Security Action Plan, at the end of last year the Secretary issued a memorandum on research and development priorities. Continued pest and disease incursions continue to threaten U.S. farmers and ranchers. For example, continued New World Screwworm infestations in Mexico, the continued westward expansion of the Spotted Lanternfly, persistence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, and the decimation of our domestic citrus industry due to citrus greening are just a few instances of how invasive pests and diseases threaten American agriculture and our natural resources. Research and development focused on new and effective methods for preventing, detecting, controlling, and eradicating these threats is a top priority for USDA and the security of U.S. agriculture. This memorandum helps address the priorities for research, as well as knowing who we are collaborating with, ensuring tax dollars are funding priorities for American producers.

USDA's Office of Homeland Security enjoys a strong working relationship with our partners in USDA and across the U.S. interagency. With USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), which is the Department's lead under the National Response Framework Emergency Support Function (ESF) #11 for Safeguarding Animal and Plant Health, we provide critical connections to threat intelligence resources which APHIS uses to mitigate operational and strategic risk.

As the Committee is likely aware, the continuing northward creep of New World Screwworm towards our borders poses a potential risk to our livestock industry, pets, and wildlife. While we've not seen indications of intentional screwworm spread, the well-recognized involvement of cartels—recently designated as foreign terrorist organizations—in transboundary cattle smuggling

is likely exacerbating the natural spread of this pest. The ongoing security situation south of our border also complicates effective control, pest surveillance, and places our personnel responsible for addressing this pest at risk. I present this example to highlight the complexity of our globally connected agricultural supply chains, and to emphasize the risk present in this critical infrastructure sector. The USDA Office of Homeland Security works hand-in-hand with both USDA Agencies, like APHIS, and Federal partners, including CBP, to ensure we have the best, most up-to-date information to aid in strategic decision making.

USDA also works cooperatively and collaborates with FBI and CBP to identify threats or suspected acts of agroterrorism and carry out effective and coordinated investigations and response, including multi-layered interagency enforcement. USDA supports FBI investigations by sharing information, assisting in investigatory activities, and pursuing concurrent administrative action. USDA participates in FBI agroterrorism training, as well as localized law enforcement meetings and discussions to ensure close working relationships and readiness across agencies.

Just a few months ago, FBI's Director Kash Patel commented on the recent Michigan case involving the foreign graduate students who illicitly brought *Fusarium*—an agricultural pathogen—into the United States as a “persistent and enduring threat.” U.S. agriculture and American farmers are faced with this—and many other—persistent and enduring threats. The Department of Agriculture leans on our partners to assist in investigating and remedying these issues. That's why I'm delighted to have our colleagues from the Department of Homeland Security here with us today as they have additional authorities, resources, and personnel to assist us in detecting—and defending—against the most tenacious threats to U.S. agriculture, our economy, and national security.

Situations like those that happened last year in Michigan underscore the importance of knowing that Federally funded agricultural research and development at universities is being done in conjunction with trusted partners. Today, USDA announced the creation of an office dedicated to enhancing research security within the USDA Office of the Chief Scientist. This new office will be tasked with helping USDA continue to implement NSPM-33 and educate USDA partners about why research security matters when it comes to agriculture.

The U.S. Government has traditionally viewed ‘agroterrorism’ through the lens of potentially dangerous pests or diseases intentionally operationalized by State or non-State actors to damage American agriculture and inflict harm on the U.S. populace. However, it is important that we do not over-index on just ‘biothreats.’ As the “foundation of manufacturing and commerce”, the threats against agriculture are so much more than the threat of contagion in one crop or several species. Agriculture is the absolute core of rural American livelihoods and well-being. If our producers cannot grow and sell their food, fuel, or fiber products at markets either domestically or abroad, rural America cannot thrive. Disruption to those delicate systems of systems such as interruptions to viable and reliable germplasm; position, navigation, and timing; labor for harvesting and processing; cold-chain storage; transportation logistics and enduring port access; or reliable and real-time market information—each or all can spell cascading disaster to our nation’s heartland. As we think about ‘agroterrorism’ as a nation, I respectfully ask the Committee to encourage a wider, more holistic potential appreciation for the problem set we collectively face as we look at agriculture as fundamental to our national security.

It is often easy to forget that the food on our plates, the clothes on our backs, and the warmth of our fires are all predicated upon someone somewhere transforming a living or once living thing into something that sustains us as individuals, families, communities, and a Nation. The foundational place of agriculture in our overall well-being as American people and—perhaps more or most importantly—source of might for the nation cannot be understated. Safeguarding agriculture is something we take very seriously at the Department of Agriculture. If we do our work in silos individually, we collectively will fail together we must stay vigilant against any risks and threats to agriculture on a continuous basis.

Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee - thank you again for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify on this important topic. I would also like to thank my colleagues that are joining today and our partners in the interagency, as this is a whole of government effort. None of us could do this independently so our continued cooperation and collaboration is essential. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.