



Testimony of

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ON

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Assessing Federal Government Efforts”*

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Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to defend the United States from agroterrorism and related biological threats. As the Senior Health Security and Biodefense Advisor at the DHS Office of Health Security (OHS), I am honored to share the Department's approach to protecting our nation's food and agriculture sector and systems. With extensive experience in biosafety and biosecurity, including leading technical audits and serving as a subject matter expert on chemical and biological programs across multiple federal agencies—I have first-hand knowledge of the potential threats to our nation's food and agriculture systems and the resources available to protect them.

Advances in biotechnology and artificial intelligence (AI) have made it easier for state and non-state actors to develop and deploy biological agents that could devastate crops, livestock, and food production, threatening economic stability and national security. Strengthening biosurveillance, biosecurity, and response capabilities is essential to protect America's agricultural sector from these evolving threats. As emphasized in the USDA National Farm Security Action Plan, farm security is national security. At DHS, OHS supports this principle by leading and coordinating DHS's efforts to protect the nation's food and agriculture sector from agroterrorism and other high-consequence threats. OHS ensures that the security and resilience of American agriculture remain at the forefront of our homeland security mission.

OHS Authorities and Mission

OHS serves as the Department's principal medical, workforce health and safety, and public health authority. Under the Securing Our Agriculture and Food Act, OHS has responsibility to coordinate DHS efforts to defend the nation's food, agriculture, and veterinary systems against terrorism and other high-consequence threats, whether intentional or naturally occurring. This responsibility includes oversight of the Department's activities related to veterinary public health, food defense, and agricultural security and leading the Department's policy initiatives relating to preparedness, detection, response, and recovery activities for agroterrorism and intentional biological threats. OHS also has responsibilities to defend against agriculture and food threats through the National Security Memorandum-16 (NSM-16), the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002, the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act, the Food Safety Modernization Act, the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, and the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

OHS's Role and Activities in Managing Risks to Food and Agriculture

1. Coordination and Policy Leadership

OHS leads the Department's policy initiatives and provides coordination for DHS's food, agriculture, and veterinary defense activities. In order to do so, we work closely with DHS Components, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Science and Technology Directorate (S&T), as well as with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, and other federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners. OHS

ensures that DHS's efforts are postured, unified, efficient, and responsive to evolving agroterrorism threats.

2. Risk Assessment and Intelligence Integration

OHS leads and coordinates the Department's overall risk assessment activities in partnership with S&T. While S&T provides technical threat analysis, risk modeling, and scientific data to characterize and quantify risks to the food and agriculture sector, OHS integrates S&T's analytical products through a policy, preparedness, and operational planning perspective for biological, chemical, and radiological hazards affecting food and agriculture. For example, a key element of our strategy is maturing and augmenting a network of fusion center health analysts at the local level that are embedded in state-run fusion centers across the country. These analysts play a critical role in gathering, analyzing, and disseminating health security intelligence, ensuring that actionable information reaches state and local decision-makers, industry stakeholders, and frontline responders. Through regular engagement and technical assistance, OHS supports the fusion center health analyst community in identifying emerging threats and to better prepare our communities for rapid responses.

3. Preparedness, Exercises, and Training

OHS effectuates statutory responsibilities, Executive Orders, and the USDA National Farm Security Action Plan to ensure coordination and connection to protect the national food systems and agriculture industry. As an integral part of this multi-layered approach, OHS designs and executes complex exercises based on scenarios that test and strengthen the nation's ability to prevent, detect, and respond to potentially catastrophic threats to U.S. food and agriculture sector, including agroterrorism incidents. Recently, on January 14, 2026, OHS led a comprehensive tabletop exercise in El Paso, Texas, focused on strategic preparedness and response to potential New World screwworm (NWS) infestations. NWS is a parasitic insect that presents a severe threat to livestock, wildlife, and a more limited threat to human health, with the potential to disrupt agricultural livestock production, and make impacts to trade, and public health.

OHS worked across the federal interagency and with state, local, and tribal partners to convene over 250 participants including operational decision-makers from federal, state, local, and tribal agencies, representing law enforcement, public health, agriculture, environmental response sectors, and other critical partners. The scenario explored three unique NWS introduction pathways, challenging participants to coordinate incident response, communication, and contingency planning for cascading impacts.

Key outcomes included strengthened coordination and identification of planning and capacity gaps, including the need for targeted education and outreach to a broader set of stakeholders. The exercise also highlighted trade implications, laboratory bottlenecks, and the importance of an approach that integrates clinical, public health, food, agriculture, and veterinary sectors. This event is just one example of exercises that OHS has developed and hosted that have improved

understanding of agency roles, preparedness, and opportunities for new partnerships, preparing participants for stronger coordination to prevent and respond to agricultural and biological threats.

4. Innovation and Continuous Improvement

OHS invests in data analytics, and technology solutions to enhance early warning, detection, and response capabilities. Through initiatives such as the Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks, OHS is advancing the nation's ability to collaboratively prepare for, respond to, and mitigate emerging agroterrorism threats.

Conclusion

The risks to food and agriculture are significant and evolving. Food security is national security. DHS, the Office of Health Security, and our partners are committed to safeguarding the nation's food and agriculture systems, by fostering collaboration, driving innovation, and ensuring the readiness of our homeland to meet the challenges ahead.

Thank you for your support and the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.