



Testimony
of

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Introduction

Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP's) vital role in protecting the United States from agroterrorism and other biological threats as part of our border security mission.

Under the leadership of the Secretary of Homeland Security and the CBP Commissioner, CBP's Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison office within the Office of Field Operations continues to strengthen the nation's ability to detect and intercept agricultural and biological threats. This office is at the forefront of a multi-layered process that safeguards American agriculture, the economy, and communities from the risks associated with the entry, establishment, or spread of pests, pathogens, and harmful agents which can affect human, animal and crop health, and leads or performs activities to defend against threats of bio- and agroterrorism.

Biological materials, including diagnostic specimens, genetic materials, human and veterinary products, infectious substances, microorganisms, and disease vector hosts such as ticks and mosquitoes, are frequently imported into the United States to support critical research and medical activities. However, these imports can carry significant risks. The introduction of an invasive pest or a biological agent, such as a virus, bacteria, or fungus, could devastate U.S. agriculture, threaten public health, and disrupt food supply chains. For example, the introduction of pests and diseases such as New World screwworm and African swine fever virus could severely impact the U.S. livestock population and have a significant economic impact.

Agricultural and biological threats are dynamic and increasingly complex. A traveler may accidentally bring in a prohibited item forgotten at the bottom of a suitcase, or an importer may ship an unnoticed pest in a wooden shipping crate. However, some travelers and importers may attempt to smuggle materials into the United States to circumvent inspections, permits, and other import requirements. CBP's role in safeguarding the nation from agricultural and biological threats becomes even more crucial as agroterrorism threats continue to evolve and challenge traditional security measures. For example, CBP recently intercepted individuals from the People's Republic of China who attempted to smuggle biological samples of a dangerous fungal pathogen into the University of Michigan.¹ The violators in this case attempted to ship potential harmful genetically modified seeds and genetic materials. These items, imported as *de minimis* shipments through express consignment facilities, were artfully concealed in documents and magazines in an apparent attempt to avoid CBP detection. Through extensive coordination and collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, these individuals were charged with smuggling and other charges, resulting in the removal of one defendant from the United States and a felony conviction with a sentence of time served for the other defendant. In another example, on December 19, 2025, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Kash Patel posted on X that a post-doctoral researcher and J-1 visa holder from China, Youhuang Xiang, was charged with smuggling *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) into the United States.² The biological materials encountered in this case were hidden in a shipment of clothing in an attempt to circumvent U.S. laws and CBP detection.

¹ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/chinese-national-pleads-guilty-and-sentenced-smuggling-dangerous-biological-pathogen>

² Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Kash Patel [@FBIDirectorKash]. 2025, December 19). *Youhuang Xiang, a post-doctoral researcher and J-1 visa holder from China was charged with smuggling Escherichia coli (E. coli) into the U.S. and making false statements about it.*

Adversaries may also pursue agroterrorism—the deliberate attack upon the U.S. agricultural sector—knowing that the introduction of a deadly pathogen, virus, seed, or bacteria could devastate crops, livestock, and natural resources, and have cascading, long-term effects on our economy.

Recognizing these risks, and as part of the enactment of the Homeland Security Act establishing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003, Congress transferred agricultural quarantine and inspection duties from the Department of Agriculture to DHS, thereby integrating agricultural security into DHS’s border security mission.

Today, CBP uses risk-based traveler and trade targeting, data intelligence, scientific and law enforcement expertise, federal and private sector partnerships, and advanced detection capabilities to protect the nation against unintentional entries as well as those seeking to deliberately bring dangerous biological or agricultural materials into the United States.

Furthermore, President Trump’s Executive Order 14324, suspending the *de minimis* exemption for low-value shipments, further strengthens CBP’s efforts to enforce trade laws and screen imports for potentially dangerous biological materials.³ This regulatory change ensures that all shipments, regardless of value, are subject to appropriate inspection and enforcement, reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing CBP’s ability to intercept threats.

Intercepting Agricultural and Biological Threats as Part of CBP’s Border Security Mission

CBP Agriculture Specialists are the nation’s frontline defense against threats to the U.S. agricultural sector. These highly trained professionals, with expertise in biological sciences and agricultural inspections, diligently inspect international passenger baggage, cargo, and conveyances to determine the admissibility of agricultural commodities. Their work is essential in preventing the entry of transboundary pests and diseases and maintaining the vitality and security of the nation’s approximately \$1.53 trillion agricultural economy.⁴

CBP’s efforts to counter agricultural and biological threats are fully integrated into its mission to secure U.S. borders, while facilitating lawful travel and trade through air, sea, and land ports of entry. Leading these efforts are CBP’s Agriculture Specialists, who work closely with CBP Officers to process more than 88,000 cargo containers, millions of mail and express shipments, and more than 1.1 million travelers every day.⁵ CBP Agriculture Specialists use scientific and law enforcement expertise, automated targeting systems, x-ray technology, predictive analytics tools, and comprehensive information sharing to ensure the safe facilitation of international trade and travel while upholding the integrity of America’s agricultural sector and natural environment.

With the additional danger of agroterrorism, the role of CBP Agriculture Specialists at our ports of entry is more crucial than ever. Agriculture specialists complete rigorous training in plant pest identification, quarantine procedures, and law enforcement, with port-specific instruction to address local challenges. They seize prohibited or infested items, oversee remediation actions

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/suspending-duty-free-de-minimis-treatment-for-all-countries/>

⁴ <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aqi>

⁵ <https://www.cbp.gov/document/stats/cbp-snapshot>

like treatment and disinfection, and provide guidance on threat analysis and interdiction. With more than 2,800 CBP Agriculture Specialists deployed nationwide and at select Preclearance locations, CBP maintains a robust frontline defense against both accidental and deliberate introduction of biological threats to the United States.

Each year, CBP Agriculture Specialists intercept thousands of “actionable pests,” those identified through scientific risk assessment as being dangerous to the health and safety of U.S. agricultural resources. In Fiscal Year 2025, CBP Agriculture Specialists interdicted approximately 1.7 million prohibited plant materials, meat, and animal byproducts at ports of entry, while also intercepting more than 100,000 pests from entering the United States.

Recognizing the evolving nature of agroterrorism and biological threats, CBP’s Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison office established the Biological Threat Exclusion branch to enhance CBP’s capability to defend against biological threats to the United States. The branch is comprised of Biological Threat Exclusion Coordinators, who provide guidance to field personnel for the clearance, analysis, and inspection of biological materials and ensure that policies, procedures, and best practices are appropriately implemented throughout the Agency. The branch provides programmatic management of its 37 Biological Threat Operations Specialist positions, strategically situated throughout the Agency’s workforce. Biological Threat Operations Specialists provide operational responses to biological threats at ports of entry and serve as frontline technical advisors for the targeting, risk analysis, inspection, adjudication, and intelligence or informational reporting of biological materials.

Advanced Targeting Capabilities

CBP uses many of the same tools that support its anti-terrorism activities to target potentially harmful agricultural items approaching U.S. borders via shipments or individual travelers. Analysts at the National Targeting Center use sophisticated data systems to proactively analyze passenger and cargo information before departure from foreign ports. These critical decision-support tools assist CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists in identifying shipments or travelers that warrant comprehensive screening or inspection upon arrival. To further enhance agriculture targeting, CBP has integrated Agriculture Specialists within the infrastructure of its National Targeting Center, allowing for a heightened focus on identifying high-risk entities that may attempt to import shipments with pests, prohibited products, contaminants, or smuggled goods. Agriculture Specialists at the National Targeting Center also serve as a conduit for agriculture information and intelligence collection at the national level. Working alongside CBP Officers and other agency partners at the National Targeting Center, Agriculture Specialists develop, coordinate, and implement intelligence and information capabilities that support the execution of CBP’s primary mission to secure America’s borders.

Specialized Detection Capabilities and Mobile Technology

Complementing its targeting activities, CBP deploys specialized canine teams, one of the Agency’s most effective assets within the Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Program. These highly trained dogs can screen luggage or cargo for hidden or forgotten fruits, meats, and other prohibited items in seconds, saving human time and resources. Today, approximately 175 CBP agriculture canine teams operate in airports, seaports, mail and express consignment facilities, and at land border ports of entry, providing a critical detection capability for prohibited agricultural products.

CBP is also leveraging technology to transform and improve business operations by expanding the Automated Targeting System Mobile Exam Findings application. By equipping Agriculture Specialists at sea, air, and land ports with portable tools, CBP can remotely complete inspections and release cargo in real time. This mobile solution speeds up cargo processing, enhances trade facilitation and enforcement, and allows frontline personnel to perform inspections efficiently without being tied to a fixed location.

Collaboration with Government and Private-Sector Partners

CBP's frontline expertise, targeting programs, and detection capabilities are further strengthened by extensive partnerships with other federal agencies and industry stakeholders. CBP enforces laws on behalf of 47 federal entities and works closely with partners such as the Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. These partnerships enable coordinated responses to emerging agricultural and biological threats and ensure that regulations and policies are harmonized across agencies.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, for example, collaborates with CBP to develop agriculture rules, regulations, policies, and training based on pest risk assessments. CBP, in turn, implements internal policies to operationalize those regulations, including how Agriculture Specialists identify shipments for exams and what safeguards to institute in response to pest detection. CBP also works directly with the Secretary's Office of Health Security to ensure operational realities inform government-wide discussions, led by Office of Health Security, regarding the protection of food and agriculture. Furthermore, recent CBP collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other federal partners resulted in the successful establishment of an interagency agreement specific to the importation of biological materials. This agreement serves as a force multiplier, significantly enhancing U.S. safety and security by delineating each agency's roles and responsibilities, including the sharing of information regarding noncompliant importation of biological materials.

Demonstrating the importance of interagency cooperation in addressing emerging threats, CBP – through its Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison office – has a critical role in the whole-of-government response to the threat of the New World screwworm.⁶ As an active member of the One Health Coordination Unit-New World Screwworm Interagency Working Group, CBP provides border security expertise and shares intelligence to help prevent this harmful pest from entering the country. Collectively, the Working Group enhances awareness of the New World screwworm threat by conducting stakeholder outreach and strengthening engagement between federal partners and trade stakeholders. To date, CBP has provided New World screwworm training to more than 23,000 frontline personnel at ports of entry, ensuring thorough awareness of this harmful pest and the federal efforts to mitigate the threat to U.S. agricultural resources. CBP is also partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture on efforts to train Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service canine teams to identify and respond to New World screwworm, facilitate importations of sterile insect fly pupae, and prepare outreach material to educate the traveling public and trade community.

⁶ <https://www.screwworm.gov>

CBP's mitigation strategy for agricultural and biological security threats involves staying aware of current and emerging agricultural and biological threats. It also includes regular training of CBP Agriculture Specialists and Officers through programs conducted or endorsed by federal partners such as the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This continuous training approach ensures CBP's frontline personnel are equipped with the most recent threat intelligence and detection methods to prevent the introduction of prohibited, invasive, or potentially dangerous pests, agricultural products or biological materials.

CBP's commitment to information sharing goes beyond internal training, extending to key industries and academic communities to strengthen awareness and compliance. Working with partner agencies, CBP engages not only with trade and transportation communities, but also with academic, research, and biopharmaceutical institutions to educate these sectors on agricultural and biological threats, share required import and export compliance measures, and promote best practices. For example, CBP maintains robust pest exclusion programs centered on some of the most devastating pests, including the Flighted Spongy Moth Complex or Spongy Moth⁷ and Khapra Beetle,⁸ as well as risks associated with pests in wood packaging material and other contaminants.

In summary, by building and maintaining strong relationships across federal agencies and industry stakeholders, CBP helps ensure that both government and private-sector partners are equipped to address the complex and evolving nature of agricultural and biological threats.

Conclusion

CBP's multi-layered approach to protecting the United States from agricultural and biological threats is actively implemented at ports of entry every day. This daily vigilance helps protect our national and economic security, preserve our natural and agricultural resources, and safeguard our communities. By combining frontline expertise, advance targeting and detection capabilities, and strong federal and industry partnerships, CBP effectively detects and intercepts dangerous materials, preventing potentially harmful pests and biological threats from entering the United States.

Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture National Invasive Species Information Center, <https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/terrestrial/invertebrates/flighted-spongy-moth-complex>

⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture National Invasive Species Information Center, <https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/terrestrial/invertebrates/khapra-beetle>