

**SURVEYING THE THREAT OF AGROTERRORISM,
PART II: ASSESSING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
EFFORTS**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND
TECHNOLOGY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION
FEBRUARY 11, 2026
Serial No. 119-39

Printed for the use of the Committee on Homeland Security



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

63-778 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2026

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SURVEYING THE THREAT OF AGROTERRORISM, PART II: ASSESSING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
AND TECHNOLOGY,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 p.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Dale W. Strong [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Strong and Kennedy.

Also present: Representative Van Epps.

Chairman STRONG. The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management Technology will come to order. Without objection, the Chair may declare the subcommittee in recess at any point. The purpose of this hearing is to review Federal efforts in preparing for and responding to threats facing our Nation's food and agriculture sector. Without objection, the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Van Epps, is permitted to sit on the dais and ask questions to the witnesses. I now recognize myself for an opening statement. Good afternoon and thank you for joining this Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology. Today we have a Federal panel of witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security and the United States Department of Agriculture to discuss the Federal Government's efforts to prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from acts of agroterrorism.

The subcommittee previously met in September to examine this threat, during which academic experts outlined the risk that agroterrorism poses to our food and agriculture system and its potential to destabilize the United States economy and agriculture supply chain. Terrorists who target our food supply have a variety of tools and methods at their disposal. They can directly target our agriculture by deploying chemical and biological agents. As our critical infrastructure becomes increasingly connected, they could also carry out cyber attacks on technology that the farms depend on. Our adversaries, particularly the PRC, have also exploited research security gaps to steal the intellectual properties tied to agriculture technologies and genetically modified organisms. This theft could cause significant economic harm and raise concerns that these technologies could be manipulated or weaponized against U.S. crop systems. The reality of this threat was a full—on full dis-

play last year when the Department of Justice charged three Chinese nationals with attempts to smuggle biological agents into the United States, agents capable of causing severe harm to crop and livestock. Any serious effort to prepare for these threats must begin with preventing deadly pathogens and harmful species from entering the country through our borders and ports of entry.

I'm grateful to Customs and Border Protection work in detecting and intercepting these dangers, but prevention cannot stop at the border. We must also deny adversaries opportunities to position themselves inside the United States in ways that could facilitate harm. The PRC has acquired farmland across the United States, including land near critical infrastructure and sensitive military installations. This proximity creates vulnerabilities that could be exploited to surveil, disrupt, or compromise our food and agriculture systems, undermining prevention efforts long before threat is detected. Addressing these risks requires strong oversight, transparency, and coordination to ensure that our agriculture sectors do not become a staging ground for hostile activities. Even with strong prevention measures in place, we must be prepared for the possibility that these efforts could fail. It is important that the stakeholders and decision makers across all levels of Government and the private sector receive adequate training to detect, report, and respond to these threats.

Equally important is robust information sharing across the national laboratories, Government partners, and industries to enable rapid and effective responses. We saw the value of this partnership last week when law enforcement recovered and identified biological material from a lab in Las Vegas and sent it to the National Bio Forensic Analysis center for immediate analysis. That rapid response capability is essential to defending our homeland against biological threats, whether they originate from the criminal actors, terrorists, or hostile foreign adversaries. This is exactly the type of capability we must sustain and strengthen, which is why I've led bipartisan efforts to improve DHS biodefense readiness and advanced legislation to counter China's efforts to undermine our homeland security. I also applaud President Donald Trump and his administration for issuing the National Farm Security Action Plan to enhance our Nation's preparedness for these dangers. This effort reflects the reality that the threat of agroterrorism is not just a possibility. It is real, evolving, and demands action across the Federal Government.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the steps they have taken to implement the proposals outlined in this plan, the challenges that they face, and opportunities to enhance collaboration amongst Federal agencies. I also welcome any suggestions on how Congress can support these efforts. I thank our witnesses for appearing before the subcommittee today, and I hope their testimony will inspire a bipartisan effort to strengthen and defend against the significant threats.

[The statement of Chairman Strong follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DALE W. STRONG

Good afternoon and thank you for joining the Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology.

Today, we have a Federal panel of witnesses from DHS and USDA who will discuss the current efforts and programs of the Federal Government to prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from acts of agroterrorism.

The subcommittee previously met in September to consider this serious threat, where witnesses from academia spoke about the risks to food and agriculture posed by agroterrorists and the startling ways in which they could influence the stability of the United States' economy and agricultural supply chain.

Agroterrorists have a variety of tools and methods at their disposal. They can target our agriculture directly by deploying chemical and biological agents.

With the greater interconnectedness of our critical infrastructure systems, agroterrorists can also initiate cyber attacks against the digital technologies our farms rely on.

And notably, our Nation's adversaries, especially affiliates of the People's Republic of China, have exploited gaps in research security to commit acts of intellectual property theft of genetically-modified organisms and agricultural technologies.

This type of theft not only has the potential to cause economic distress to the United States, but these advanced technologies have the potential to be manipulated and weaponized against our crop systems.¹

The potential for the threat of agroterrorism was on full display last year when the DOJ charged 3 Chinese nationals with attempts to smuggle biological agents into the United States—biological agents that have the potential to cause significant harm to crops and livestock.

Any effort to seriously and effectively prepare for agroterrorist threats must include stopping deadly pathogens and invasive species as they come across our borders and ports of entry, and I am grateful to CBP in their work in detecting and intercepting the threats uncovered last year.

But we must also be ready if our efforts at prevention fail. Ensuring that stakeholders and decision makers across all levels of government and the private sector receive adequate training to detect, report, and respond to these threats is paramount in securing our Nation's food and agriculture.

Furthermore, coordinating information-sharing efforts between our various national laboratories, executive agencies, State and local law enforcement, emergency managers, and stakeholders will be critical to enabling rapid response to any emerging threats.

I was pleased to see these collaborative efforts in action just last week, when law enforcement collected samples of unidentified biological materials at the scene of a bio lab in Las Vegas to send to the National Bioforensic Analysis Center for immediate diagnostic testing.²

This center plays an important role in our national security and is one of two components of the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center, the first national laboratory created by DHS. I am proud to say that I am hard at work on legislation to authorize this national laboratory to ensure that we can continue to stay on top of biological threats for years to come.

I applaud President Trump and his administration for issuing the National Farm Security Action Plan to enhance our Nation's preparedness for these dangers.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today regarding the steps they have taken to implement the proposals outlined in this plan, the challenges they encounter in securing our Nation from agroterrorist threats, and the opportunities for enhanced interagency collaboration.

I also welcome any suggestions on how Congress can be helpful in these endeavors.

I appreciate the work that our partners in the Executive branch do every day, and I hope that the testimonies we hear will inspire a bipartisan effort to enhance solutions to counter this significant threat.

Chairman STRONG. I now recognize the Ranking Member of this subcommittee, Mr. Kennedy, for his opening statement.

Mr. KENNEDY. Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I want to begin by saying that I appreciate the Chairman for bringing officials from the administration before this subcommittee. I want to see more of these hearings with administration witnesses in the fu-

¹ China's Interests in U.S. Agriculture.

² Bio lab found in Las Vegas is similar to scene discovered in California, raising questions from officials—CBS News.

ture. I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the greatest threat to our Nation currently. With all due respect to our witnesses, is not agroterrorism. We're seeing a Department of Homeland Security that's killing our own citizens, terrorizing communities, ignoring court orders, rejecting due process, and advancing an extreme immigration enforcement agenda that's stoking fear, creating chaos, and degrading our democratic institutions. The Trump administration is also dismantling FEMA before our eyes, refusing to distribute critical counterterrorism grant funding, and moving forward with plans to cut half of FEMA's work force. Mr. Chairman, yesterday I sent a letter to your office to formally request that this subcommittee turns its focus to FEMA issues, including delays in preparedness and counterterrorism grants, work force challenges, and areas for improvement in disaster recovery. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to insert this letter into the record.

Chairman STRONG. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

February 10, 2026.

The Honorable DALE STRONG,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology, Committee on
Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR CHAIRMAN STRONG:

I write to request that you, in your capacity as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology, immediately convene an oversight hearing on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In March 2025, you began your term as Chairman of our subcommittee with an oversight hearing on FEMA. In the year since the hearing, serious and concerning changes have emerged regarding the Trump administration's actions at FEMA. There are reports that Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem is withholding nearly \$17 billion in disaster relief funding.¹ At the same time, FEMA's administration of counterterrorism and preparedness grant programs has resulted in unprecedented delays and interruptions in the release of grant funding that States, localities, Tribes, and territories rely on to prepare for disasters and emergencies.

Secretary Noem also reportedly delayed funding for search and rescue teams and call centers in the aftermath of flooding in Central Texas in July 2025—an event that killed 135 people, including 35 children.^{2 3} More recently, Secretary Noem pushed forward her plans to cut half of FEMA's workforce even as nearly half of U.S. States struggled to recover from winter storms that killed over 100 people.⁴ These significant workforce reductions and staffing instability raise questions about the Agency's capacity to meet its statutory responsibilities during a period of increasing disaster frequency and severity.

An oversight hearing would provide the subcommittee with an opportunity to hear directly from FEMA leadership about the impacts of delayed or withheld preparedness and disaster relief funding, workforce cuts, and how these challenges may affect emergency management capabilities at all levels of government.

I appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to ensure the subcommittee continues to exercise strong oversight in support of FEMA's critical mission to keep communities safe and resilient.

Sincerely,

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY,

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology.

¹Scott Dance, *Extra Scrutiny of FEMA Aid to States Has Created a \$17 Billion Bottleneck*, NY TIMES (Jan. 27, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/27/climate/fema-aid-kristi-noem.html>.

²Gabe Cohen, *FEMA's response to Texas flood slowed by Noem's cost controls*, CNN (July 10, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/09/politics/fema-texas-flood-noem>.

³Maxine Joselow, *FEMA Didn't Answer Thousands of Calls From Flood Survivors, Documents Show*, NY TIMES (July 11, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/11/climate/fema-missed-calls-texas-floods.html>.

⁴Gabriela Aoun Angueira, *FEMA will resume staff reductions that were paused during winter storm, managers say*, AP NEWS (Feb. 6, 2026), <https://apnews.com/article/fema-staff-cuts-kristi-noem-winter-storm-fern-1b3a4ea77c6f299abda3f5046a6b24e5>.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you. Last year, I introduced a bill, H.R. 6507, the Department of Homeland Security Grants Accountability Act, which would require increased transparency and oversight of FEMA's Counterterrorism Grant programs. I hope that's something we'll have an opportunity to discuss on the subcommittee in the coming months. Turning to today's hearing, I agree that our Nation must strengthen its biodefense, including better preparing for potential attacks on our agricultural systems. This includes ensuring that we have enough agricultural specialists at our borders to detect harmful pathogens, investing in research and development at U.S. institutions through USDA, and strengthening our supply chains to ensure they're resilient against potential bad actors. But the way to do this is not by closing the Department of Homeland Security Centers of Excellence or freezing funding for USDA university partnerships, including those that directly support agrosecurity. One of these closed Centers of Excellence directly supported agrosecurity by researching and educating Federal partners on how to detect and eliminate biological threats that cross our borders.

In my home State of New York, the administration halted funding for Cornell University's Animal Health Diagnostic Center, which tests livestock for diseases that could devastate agricultural sectors and our economy. This significantly impacts their ability to survey for high-consequence animal diseases. All of that's to say, the Chairman and I are in full agreement that we must strengthen our Nation's capabilities against threats of agroterrorism, whether they be foreign or domestic. I believe we do so by bolstering Federal investment and resources rather than gutting them. This also means ensuring our Customs facilitators have the resources needed to survey biological threats. I have four bridges in my district in western New York into Canada. I represent some of CBP's agricultural specialists who report to work at U.S. ports of entry and contribute every single day to our collective biosecurity. So I understand the importance of ensuring our Nation is hardened against any biological threats, and I appreciate the Chairman's work in this space.

I want to thank our witnesses for participating in today's hearing, and I look forward to your testimony as we assess DHS and USDA's preparedness in keeping our communities safe. I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Kennedy follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY

FEBRUARY 11, 2026

I want to begin by saying that I appreciate the Chairman for bringing officials from the administration before our subcommittee. I hope to see more hearings with administration witnesses in the future.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the greatest threat to our Nation currently, and with all due respect to our witnesses, it's not agroterrorism.

We are seeing a Department of Homeland Security that is killing our own citizens, terrorizing communities, ignoring court orders, rejecting due process, and advancing an extreme immigration enforcement agenda that is stoking fear, creating chaos, and degrading our democratic institutions. The Trump administration is also dismantling FEMA before our eyes, refusing to distribute critical counterterrorism grant funding and moving forward with plans to cut half of FEMA's workforce.

Mr. Chairman, yesterday, I sent a letter to your office to formally request that this subcommittee turn its focus to FEMA issues, including delays in preparedness and counterterrorism grants, workforce challenges, and areas for improvement in disaster recovery. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to insert this letter into the record.

Last year, I introduced a bill, H.R. 6507, the DHS Grants Accountability Act, which would require increased transparency and oversight of FEMA's counterterrorism grant programs, and I hope that's something we will have an opportunity to discuss on this subcommittee in the coming months.

Turning to today's hearing, I agree that our Nation must strengthen its bio-defense, including better preparing for potential attacks on our agricultural systems.

This includes ensuring we have enough agricultural specialists at our borders to detect harmful pathogens, investing in research and development at U.S. institutions through USDA, and strengthening our supply chains to ensure they're resilient against potential bad actors. But the way to do this is not by closing DHS's Centers of Excellence or freezing funding for USDA university partnerships, including those that directly support agrosecurity.

One of these closed Centers of Excellence directly supported agrosecurity by researching and educating Federal partners on how to detect and eliminate biological threats that cross our borders. And in my home State of New York, the administration halted funding for Cornell University's Animal Health Diagnostic Center, which tests livestock for diseases that could devastate agriculture sectors and our economy. This significantly impacts their ability to survey for high-consequence animal diseases. All of that is to say, the Chairman and I are in full agreement that we must strengthen our Nation's capabilities against threats of agroterrorism, whether they be foreign or domestic, and I believe we do so by bolstering Federal investments and resources rather than gutting them. This also means ensuring our customs facilitators have the resources needed to survey biological threats.

I have four bridges that connect my district in Western New York to Canada. I represent some of CBP's agricultural specialists who report to work at U.S. ports of entry and contribute every single day to our collective biosecurity. So, I understand the importance of ensuring our Nation is hardened against any biological threats, and I appreciate the Chairman's work in this space. I want to thank our witnesses for participating in today's hearing, and I look forward to your testimony as we assess DHS and USDA's preparedness in keeping our communities safe.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you, Ranking Member Kennedy. Other Members of the subcommittee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

For my home State of Mississippi, agriculture is the lifeblood of the economy. The vulnerability of our community to biological threats is not theoretical, but rather an existential threat to the livelihoods of thousands of families.

As our farmers already struggle with rising input costs and market volatility created by Donald Trump's tariffs, the added risk of agroterrorism could lead to irreversible, catastrophic economic damage. And while we recognize the threats posed by agroterrorism, it is important for today's hearing to also face the fact that the Trump administration continues to degrade our national security infrastructure, which has also affected our ability to detect and prevent biological threats.

The proposed budget cuts and on-going staffing cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control represent a dangerous retreat from our Nation's biodefense infrastructure and significantly weaken our ability to detect and respond to agroterrorism before they can devastate our food supply. By gutting the very surveillance and emergency programs designed to monitor zoonotic diseases and agricultural pathogens, we are essentially leaving the gates open to those who would use biological agents to destabilize our economy and threaten public safety.

This vulnerability is compounded by Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) and hastily close the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Both actions further exacerbate the risk of biological diseases spreading by dismantling the international early warning systems that provide us with critical intelligence on emerging global threats.

In the context of agroterrorism, our safety depends on global cooperation and the ability to stop an outbreak at its source. Without these partnerships, we are creating blind spots that put our domestic livestock and crops at unnecessary risk of

intentional contamination. Lastly, I want to say that the Trump administration is actively dismantling the very agency we rely on when disasters, including biological events, happen: FEMA.

The administration is firing FEMA personnel and plans to eliminate half of the agency's workforce. They are refusing to distribute critical counterterrorism grants and have injected an unprecedented level of chaos into the grants process. In doing so, they are effectively abandoning our State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners, leaving them defenseless because the White House would rather settle political scores than save lives. This systematic dismantling of our domestic response capabilities is not an isolated failure; it is a symptom of a broader, more dangerous agenda: Trump's degradation of our national security.

What's more, our Congressional colleagues are pushing legislation that rips FEMA out of DHS with no consideration of the detrimental effects on the Department, including fracturing FEMA's counterterrorism responsibilities and crippling of the agency's mandate for continuity of government. This committee should be taking an active role in the conversation on FEMA's future and the Trump administration's on-going harm to our Nation's security. I hope it will do so immediately.

Chairman STRONG. I'm very pleased to have such an important panel of witnesses before us today. Ms. Suzette Kelly is the deputy executive director of Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison for the CBP's Office of Field Operations at DHS. In this role, Ms. Kelly provides leadership and expertise while guiding collaboration and partnerships to safeguard our agriculture and Nation's food supply. Mr. Matt Allen is the director of the Office of Homeland Security for the United States Department of Agriculture. He has served in this capacity since 2020 and oversees Department-wide efforts in radiation safety emergency programs, personnel and document security, national security programs and policies, communication security and operations sustainment. Mr. Jeff Cooper serves as program manager for DHS Science and Technology Directorates' PANTHR Program. PANTHR provides technical information on CBRN hazards to help leaders make informed decisions on preparedness and response to weapons of mass destruction events. Dr. Ashley Grant is the senior health security and biodefense advisor in DHS's Office of Health Security, which leads DHS's effort in medical, work force health and safety and public health. In this role, Dr. Grant helps to mitigate the impact of biological threats. I thank you all again for being here today.

Pursuant to the committee's rule VII(C), I ask that the witnesses please rise and raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you will give before this Committee of Homeland Security of the U.S. House of Representatives will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[Witnesses sworn.]

Chairman STRONG. Thank you. Please be seated. Let the record reflect that the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. I now recognize Mr. Kelly for 5 minutes to summarize her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF SUZETTE P. KELLY, ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS AND TRADE LIAISON, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mrs. KELLY. Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's role in protecting the United States from agroterrorism and biological threats. I am hon-

ored to represent CBP's Office of Field Operations, Agriculture Programs, and Trade Liaison. Every day, our front-line personnel work tirelessly to safeguard American agriculture, natural resources, and our communities by preventing the introduction and spread of dangerous pests, animal diseases, and biological agents. Agricultural and biological materials, including animal products, genetic materials, and infectious substances, are routine imports that sustain our food supply and support scientific research and medical advancements.

However, these imports also pose significant risks. The accidental or deliberate introduction of a pest, pathogen, or disease could have significant adverse effects on domestic agriculture and natural resources. For example, CBP recently intercepted illicit shipments from the People's Republic of China sent to U.S. researchers at academic institutions. These shipments contained a dangerous fungal pathogen, harmful genetic materials, and *E. Coli* concealed to evade CBP detection and circumvent U.S. laws. To mitigate these types of threats, CBP integrates agricultural inspection into its multi-layered border security strategy that includes highly-trained personnel, advanced targeting and detection capabilities, and close collaboration with Federal partners and industry stakeholders. Using their scientific and law enforcement expertise, agriculture specialists work alongside CBP officers and trade specialists to process and inspect millions of shipments and traveler luggage at air, sea, and land ports of entry. The work we do is vital. In fiscal year 2025 alone, CBP agriculture specialists interdicted approximately 1.7 million prohibited plant materials, animal byproducts, and meat items. They also intercepted more than 100,000 actionable pests identified as potentially dangerous to U.S. agriculture. Recognizing the complexity of agroterrorism and biological threats, CBP established the Biological Threat Exclusion Program to strengthen our efforts and ensure a consistent approach across the agency.

Early detection of threats is essential. At the CBP National Targeting Center, agriculture specialists use advanced data systems to identify high-risk travelers and shipments before they arrive at our borders. Our specialized detection capabilities deployed to ports of entry further enhance our efforts. For example, our agriculture canine teams screen luggage and cargo for prohibited items quickly and effectively. CBP is also expanding its use of mobile technology enabling remote inspections real-time cargo release by enhancing efficiency and enforcement. Collaboration is central to our approach. CBP enforces laws on behalf of dozens of Federal entities and works closely with partners such as Department of Agriculture, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. These partnerships enable coordinated responses to emerging threats.

In closing, CBP's agricultural inspection capabilities are a critical component of our Nation's defense against agroterrorism and biological threats. Working in coordination with our partners, we will continue to identify and intercept these threats, protect our national and economic security, preserve our agricultural resources and safeguard our communities.

Thank you for your continued support of CBP's mission. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Kelly follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUZETTE P. KELLY

FEBRUARY 11, 2026

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.

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

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 [@FBIIDirectorKash]. 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 United States and making false statements about it.

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 front-line 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 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 Pre-Clearance locations, CBP maintains a robust front-line 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 front-line technical advisors for the targeting, risk analysis, inspection, adjudication, and intelligence or informational reporting of biological materials.

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>.

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 front-line personnel to perform inspections efficiently without being tied to a fixed location.

COLLABORATION WITH GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE-SECTOR PARTNERS

CBP's front-line 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

⁶<https://www.screwworm.gov>.

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 front-line 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.

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 front-line 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 front-line 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.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you, Ms. Kelly. I recognize Mr. Allen for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MATT ALLEN, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. ALLEN. Good afternoon, Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon. I have the privilege of leading the USDA Office of Homeland Security. The Office coordinates across the Department to mitigate risk, provide safeguards to USDA personnel and information by leading Government-wide initiatives in championing USDA's equities in homeland and national security. I very much appreciate the opportunity to

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

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

discuss these important topics with you today. As you know, 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 a key pillar of national security. The plan focuses on protecting U.S. farmland from foreign adversaries, strengthening food supply chains, ending fraud in nutrition programs, safeguarding plant and animal health, and bolstering research security. The National Farm Security Action Plan enables USDA to begin this critical work to address the imperative for agriculture security in America. The Action Plan serves as a launching point for USDA to work in continued unison with Government and other partners to fully integrate agriculture into broader national security enterprise.

Continuing the implementation of the plan. In January, USDA launched a new on-line portal to streamline the reporting of transactions involving U.S. agriculture land by foreign persons under the Agriculture Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978, or AFIDA, the new on-line portal's broader effort to strengthen the AFIDA enforcement and protect American farmland. We enjoy a strong working relationship with our partners across USDA and the U.S. Interagency with USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service which is Department's lead under the National Response Framework, Emergency Support Function 11 for safeguarding animal and plant health, provide critical connections to threat intelligence resources which APHIS uses to mitigate operational and strategic risk. As the committee is likely aware, we're facing the threat of the northward creep of the New World screwworm toward our border. That poses a potential risk to livestock industry and pets. While we've not seen indications of intentional spread, there's well-recognized involvement of cartels designated as foreign terrorists organizations in transboundary cattle smuggling that is likely exacerbating the problem.

The on-going security situation south of the border also complicates effective control pest surveillance and places personnel responsible for addressing this pest at risk. I present this as an example to highlight the complexity of our global connected agriculture supply chains and emphasize the risk present in this critical infrastructure sector. OHS works hand-in-hand with both USDA agencies like APHIS and Federal partners to include CBP to ensure that we have the best and most up-to-date information for strategic decision making.

As just mentioned, we collaborate with the FBI and CBP on many—to identify threats of suspected acts of agroterrorism. Just a few months ago, Director Kash Patel of the FBI commented on the recent Michigan case involving foreign graduate students who illicitly brought fusarium. An agricultural pathogen in the United States is a persistent and enduring threat. U.S. agriculture and American farmers are faced with this and many other persistent enduring threats. Our Department leans on our partners to assist us investigating remedying these issues and that's why I'm delighted to have our colleagues from DHS here with us today. They

have abundant authorities, resources, and personnel to assist us in detecting, defending the most tenacious threats to U.S. agriculture, the economy, and national security.

Those situations in Michigan underscore the importance of knowing that Federally-funded agriculture research and development is being done in conjunction with trusted partners. Just this morning, USDA announced the creation of an office dedicated to enhancing research security within USDA, continuing to implement National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 and educate USDA partners of why research security matters. It is easy to forget the food on our plates, the clothes on our backs, the warmth of our fires are all predicated on somewhere, somewhere transforming living or once living things 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 importantly, the source for might in the Nation, cannot be understated. Safeguarding agriculture is something we take very seriously at the Department.

Chairman Strong and Ranking Member Kennedy, distinguished Members of subcommittee, thank you again for holding this hearing, the opportunity to testify on this important topic. I would also like to thank my colleagues that are joining me today, 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 and I look forward to answering any questions you may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Allen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATT ALLEN

FEBRUARY 11, 2026

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 on-line 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 on-line portal is part of a broader effort to strengthen AFIDA enforcement and protect American farmland. This on-line 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) No. 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 toward 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 on-going 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.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Allen. I now recognize Mr. Cooper for his 5 minutes to summarize his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JEFF COOPER, PROGRAM MANAGER, PROBABILISTIC ANALYSIS FOR NATIONAL THREATS HAZARDS AND RISKS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DIRECTORATE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. COOPER. Good afternoon, Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate. The risks to the food and agricultural sector and supply chain are varied and serious. The Nation’s food and agricultural systems are designated critical infrastructure. The disruption, whether naturally-occurring, accidental, or intentional, can result in cascading impacts to public health, economic stability, and confidence in the Government. As global supply chains become more interconnected, they become increasingly vulnerable to biological threats and understanding and managing these potential risks is more important than ever. DHS has the Federal authority to assess and manage threats to critical infrastructure, serving as a coordinator for the whole-of-Government effort that includes all levels of government and industry owners and operators within DHS, the Science and Technology Directorate that supports this mission by providing technical threat analysis, risk analysis and decision support to inform preparedness and response efforts across the Homeland Security enterprise.

Under National Security Memorandum 16, DHS was tasked with conducting risk assessments related to threat against the food and

agriculture, working in coordination with the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human services and others. DHS's role is to ensure that leaders at the Federal, State, and local levels have clear science-based understanding of the threats they face, the potential consequences of those threats and the trade-offs associated with different preparedness and response options. S&T contributes to DHS's risk assessment mission by delivering technically-defensible analysis and user tools to help decision makers prioritize actions and resources. One way that S&T executes this mission is through the Probabilistic Analysis of National Threats, Hazards and Risks Program or PANTHR. PANTHR provides analytical capabilities that integrate threat information, hazard data and consequence modeling to support risk-informed decision making across chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive, and cyber threat areas. These capabilities are designed to inform policy and operations, not to execute or set them. Rather, they help answer fundamental questions decision makers face, including which threats pose the greatest risk, where vulnerabilities exist and where investments can most effectively reduce that risk.

Risks to the food and agricultural system are complex. They vary by agent, commodity geography and response capacity, and the consequences of disruption can extend well beyond the agricultural sector. Through PANTHR, S&T develops and applies risk and computational analytics that support strategic operational and tactical planning. These efforts help decision makers to compare risks across various scenarios and assess how different interventions may reduce the likelihood or consequences of those events. Risk assessments depend on reliable data. For many agricultural threat agents, including emerging and reemerging diseases, experimental data is limited or incomplete. To address this gap, S&T also conducts the Agricultural Threat Characterization Research Project that examines properties and impacts of biological threats relevant to agriculture such as high-pathogenic avian influenza and African swine fever. This research produces science-based knowledge products that inform hazard awareness, analytical modeling, and preparedness planning.

In addition to analysis and threat characterization, S&T conducts applied research and development to inform future capabilities and enhance agricultural biosecurity. This includes work to improve screening and sensing technologies at ports of entry as well as methodologies and decision support tools for depopulation disposal and decontamination. These efforts are designed to inform capability development and transition to our operational partners such as USDA and CBP. S&T works closely with DHS components and interagency partners including the Department of Agriculture to ensure analytical capabilities address real-world needs. Through tailored analysis, reach-back support and scenario development, S&T provides decision support to planning exercises and preparedness activities. S&T supports the USDA's National Farm Security Action Plan by providing the technical risk assessment framework needed to inform sound policy and operational decisions. In this way, S&T's contributions align with DHS's responsibilities under the National Security Memorandum 16 and complement USDA's leadership on agricultural policy compliance and enforcement. The

Science and Technology Directorate is committed to helping the Nation understand and manage these risks to the food and agricultural sector through rigorous science-based analysis and decision support. These complex risks require disciplined coordination across Federal, State, and local partners. With continued support from Congress, S&T will continue to provide the analytical foundation that informs preparedness and protects the American people, our food supply, and our economy.

Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to testify before you today. Thank you for your support of the Science and Technology Directorate. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cooper follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEFF COOPER

FEBRUARY 11, 2026

Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T).

The risks to the food and agriculture sector and supply chain are varied and serious. The Nation's food and agriculture systems are designated critical infrastructure, and their disruption, whether intentional, accidental, or naturally-occurring, can result in cascading impacts to public health, economic stability, and confidence in government. As global supply chains grow more interconnected and biological threats become easier to exploit, understanding and managing these risks is more important than ever.

DHS has the Federal authority to assess and manage threats to critical infrastructure, serving as coordinator of a whole-of-Government effort that includes all levels of government and industry owners and operators. Within DHS, the Science and Technology Directorate supports that mission by providing technical threat analysis, risk assessment, and decision support to inform preparedness and response efforts across the Homeland Security Enterprise.

DHS'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING RISKS TO THE NATION'S FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Under National Security Memorandum-16, DHS was tasked with conducting risk assessments related to threats against the food and agriculture sector. Working in coordination with the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and others, DHS's role is to ensure that leaders at the Federal, State, and local levels have a clear, science-based understanding of the threats they face, the potential consequences of those threats, and the trade-offs associated with different preparedness and response options.

S&T'S CONTRIBUTION TO RISK-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

S&T contributes to DHS's risk assessment mission by delivering technically defensible analysis and tools that help decision makers prioritize actions and resources.

One way S&T executes this mission is through the Probabilistic Analysis of National Threats, Hazards, and Risks (PANTHR) program. PANTHR provides analytical capabilities that integrate threat information, hazard data, and consequence modeling to support risk-informed decision making across chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threat areas.

These capabilities are designed to inform policy and operations, not to set or execute them. Rather, they help answer fundamental questions decision makers face: which threats pose the greatest risk, where vulnerabilities exist, and where investments can most effectively reduce risk.

RISK AND COMPUTATIONAL ANALYTICS FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

The risks to food and agriculture systems are complex. Threats vary by agent, commodity, geography, and response capacity, and the consequences of disruption can extend well beyond the agricultural sector.

Through PANTHR, S&T develops and applies risk and computational analytics that support strategic, operational, and tactical planning. These efforts help decision

makers compare risks across scenarios and assess how different interventions may reduce the likelihood or consequences of an event.

Tools such as the Tools for Integrated Evaluation of Risk (TIGER) support this work by enabling modeling and analysis tailored to the food and agriculture sector. Recent improvements have focused on increasing efficiency and timeliness through modernized data management and cloud-based capabilities, allowing analysts to provide more responsive support to DHS components and interagency partners.

AGRICULTURAL THREAT CHARACTERIZATION

Risk assessment depends on reliable data. For many agricultural threat agents, including emerging and re-emerging diseases, critical empirical data are limited or incomplete.

To address this gap, S&T conducts Agricultural Threat Characterization research that examines the properties and impacts of biological threats relevant to agriculture, such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza and African Swine Fever. This research produces science-based knowledge products that inform hazard awareness, analytical modeling, and preparedness planning.

These products are shared with DHS components and interagency partners, including USDA and FDA, to support coordinated preparedness and response efforts, while respecting the distinct authorities and responsibilities of each department.

SUPPORTING DETECTION, SCREENING, AND RESPONSE READINESS

In addition to analysis and characterization, S&T supports applied research and development to inform future capabilities that enhance agricultural biosecurity.

This includes work to improve:

- Screening and sensing technologies to help identify prohibited agricultural products at ports of entry
- Methodologies and decision support tools for depopulation, disposal, and decontamination that facilitate rapid response and prevent disease spread while minimizing waste, environmental impact, and negative public perception.

These efforts are designed to inform capability development and transition to operational partners.

DECISION SUPPORT AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

S&T works closely with DHS components and interagency partners, including the Department of Agriculture, who leads the food and agriculture sector, to ensure analytical capabilities address real-world needs. Through tailored analysis, reach-back support, and scenario development, S&T provides decision support for planning, exercises, and preparedness activities.

This includes development of targeted analytical products, scenarios, and injects that help leaders test assumptions, identify gaps, and strengthen coordination before an incident occurs. These efforts support whole-of-Government preparedness and complement USDA-led policy and programmatic initiatives.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE USDA NATIONAL FARM SECURITY ACTION PLAN

S&T supports the USDA National Farm Security Action Plan by providing the technical risk assessment foundation needed to inform sound policy and operational decisions. In this way, S&T's contributions are aligned with DHS's responsibilities under National Security Memorandum-16 (NSM-16) and complement USDA's leadership on agricultural policy, compliance, and enforcement.

The risks to the food and agriculture sector are complex and evolving and require disciplined coordination across Federal, State, and local partners. With continued support from Congress, S&T will continue to play a critical role in helping the Nation understand and manage agroterrorism risks by providing rigorous, science-based analysis and decision support that protect the American people, our food supply, and our economy.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and Members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to testify before you today.

I thank you for your support of S&T and look forward to your questions.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Cooper. I now recognize Dr. Grant for 5 minutes to summarize her opening statement. Dr. Grant.

**STATEMENT OF ASHLEY GRANT, SENIOR HEALTH SECURITY
AND BIODEFENSE ADVISOR, OFFICE OF HEALTH SECURITY,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Ms. GRANT. Thank you. Thank you so much, Chairman Strong. Ranking Member Kennedy and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. I'm honored to be here to speak today about the Department of Homeland Security's effort to defend against agroterrorism and other biological threats. I have spent my entire career focused on trying to make sure our Nation is better prepared for biological incidents. As a senior health security and biodefense advisor at the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Security, I am honored to share our approach to protecting America's food and agriculture sector. Advances in biotechnology as well as artificial intelligence have made it easier for nefarious actors to develop and deploy biological agents that could devastate our crops, livestock, and food production. These threats jeopardize not only economic stability, but also our national security. At DHS, we recognize that farm security is national security. Along with USDA, the Office of Health Security leads and coordinates efforts across the Department to protect our Nation's food and agriculture sector from high-consequence threats. Our mission is rooted in statutory responsibility and key directives, including the Securing our Agriculture and Food Act. We oversee activities related to the Department's food defense, agriculture security, and lead policy initiatives for preparedness, detection, and response. Today, I will cover 4 core areas of our work.

First, coordination and policy leadership. The Office of Health Security works closely with DHS components such as Customs and Border Protection, as well as the Science and Technology Directorate. We also coordinate with our interagency partners such as USDA as well as the Health and Human Services. Together, we ensure that DHS and the U.S. Government efforts are unified, efficient, and responsive to evolving threats. Second, risk assessment and intelligence integration. The Office of Health Security partners with DHS Science and Technology Directorate to assess risks to our food and agriculture sector. We integrate technical threat analysis and risk modeling with policy and operational planning, a key element of our support to health analysts embedded in State and local fusion centers nationwide. These analysts gather and disseminate health security information, ensuring actionable intelligence reaches decision makers and front-line responders.

Third, preparedness exercises and training. The Office of Health Security designs and executes complex exercises to test and strengthen our ability to prevent, detect, and respond to biological threats. For example, last month we held a complex exercise—tabletop exercise down in El Paso, Texas. This exercise focused on a potential New World screwworm incursion in the United States through three different mechanisms. No. 1 through illicit cattle trading; No. 2, through our livestock; and a potential human case. This is a severe pest that can affect our economy as well as our livestock. The exercise brought over 250 participants from Federal, State, local, county, Tribal, different agencies and highlighted the importance of an integrated response and identified gaps in planning and capability.

Our fourth core function is innovation and continuous improvement. The Office of Health Security invests in data analytics and technology solutions to enhance early warning detection and response. Early detection and rapid response is critical to making sure we are prepared for threats to our food and agriculture. Through initiatives like the Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks, we are advancing our collaborative ability to prepare for and mitigate from emerging threats. In conclusion, threats against our food and agriculture sector are significant and evolving. DHS, the Office of Health Security, and our partners are committed to safeguarding the Nation's food and agriculture system through collaboration, innovation, and readiness.

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

[The prepared statement of Ms. Grant follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ASHLEY GRANT

FEBRUARY 11, 2026

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 front-line 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.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you, Dr. Grant. Members will be recognized by order of seniority for their 5 minutes of questioning. An

additional round of questioning may be called after all Members have been recognized. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning.

The actions of agroterrorism could become even more dangerous if they had access to farmland near U.S. military bases. Redstone Arsenal is in my district and I understand first-hand the threat this could pose to our service members and our homeland security. This is why I'm concerned by a 2024 GAO report which found gaps in Federal reporting requirements that could allow it to happen. Fortunately, the Trump administration's National Farm Security Action Plan has called for stronger USDA reporting and disclosure requirements for foreign farmland purchases near military bases and other sensitive sites. Mr. Allen, how is the USDA seeking to implement the National Farm Security Action Plan's proposal to tighten these reporting requirements? What steps has the Department taken so far?

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the question and your support of this. Right now, the Department is in the process of moving the Agriculture Foreign Investment Disclosure Act Program from the Farm Production Conservation Mission area to my office to have a more national security focus. Also, as I mentioned, in January we opened an on-line portal that will have as a database getting us away from the 1978 paper-based process to modernize the AFIDA's system. We have also issued at the end of last calendar year an advance notice of proposed rulemaking to update the form, the process of the entire program to gather more pertinent information than we have in the past to share with our partners, especially at Homeland Security, Department of War, and the Treasury to integrate with the CFIUS process.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you. Switching gears, Ms. Kelly's CBP plays an important role at our Nation's borders and ports of entry to detect and intercept harmful pathogens and biological materials from entering our Nation. How have blind foreign actors exploited vulnerabilities at ports of entry to introduce threats to our Nation's agriculture? How can CBP harden its screening of these materials?

Mrs. KELLY. Thank you for the question, Chairman. What we've seen, not even specific to one particular pathway, but across many of the pathways where we are continuing to harden our processes, is are these numerous artful attempts to evade our detection capabilities. We're seeing varying levels of concealment practices such as utilizing public media comic books to obfuscate the presence of biological materials. We're also observing that there are attempts to transport these materials on their person or hidden into personal items such as bedroom slippers. To ensure that we continue to advance our inspection capabilities, we are launching efforts to modernize our infrastructure. We're making strategic investments in our non-intrusive inspection technology, and we are also working with the industry to ensure that there are sustained awareness of biological threats and the numerous attempts by which individuals and malicious actors may attempt to introduce these items.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you. Turning to Mr. Cooper, the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center, also known as NBAC is a DHS Science and Technology-operated national laboratory. Through its two centers, NBAC provides exper-

tise to help DHS understand biological threats and the capabilities of our adversaries. As I mentioned earlier, recent news reports indicated that the unidentified biological samples from an incident in Las Vegas were sent to the center for testing—or for testing. Mr. Cooper, what is the scale and scope of NBAC’s cooperation with law enforcement and how does this partnership support DHS’s mission?

Mr. COOPER. Chairman, thank you for that question. So as you mentioned, S&T does own and operate the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasure center, NBAC. The forensic center however, is operated by the FBI. So I would defer to my FBI colleagues on what—how they are participating in the investigation and supporting the State and locals for that. S&T’s role is to ensure the facility has the necessary capabilities in order for the FBI to pursue its investigations.

Chairman STRONG. Thank you. My time has expired. I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentleman from New York, Mr. Kennedy, for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you, Chairman. Our Nation’s ability to recover from some of the most significant emergencies is largely thanks to one agency, FEMA. For example, during COVID-19, FEMA led the Nation’s pandemic response efforts, distributing personal protective equipment, ventilators, and testing supplies across the country. If a large-scale agroterrorism attack occurred, FEMA’s resources and authorities would be indispensable for minimizing human casualties and economic impacts. However, Trump and Secretary Noem have both stated they want to completely get rid of FEMA. As of just days ago, there are credible reports that Secretary Noem is planning to cut FEMA’s remaining work force in half. So Dr. Grant is a senior advisor for DHS office responsible for mitigating the impact of biological threats. Do you believe that gutting FEMA’s work force improves our Nation’s ability to respond to large-scale agroterrorism attack or not?

Ms. GRANT. Thank you for your question, Ranking Member Kennedy. I believe there’s an important mission of FEMA, including the different missions that you describe. I think our office works across not only industry, but also across the Department to make sure that we’re prepared as we can be for agricultural terrorism threats. I would have to get with our FEMA representatives to talk about specific grants that you brought up in terms of cutting. So we can take that as a get-back to answer your question about the specific grants you’re referring to.

Mr. KENNEDY. If FEMA employees were cut in half, basically gutting the agency, do you believe that that would have a negative impact on your ability to do your work?

Ms. GRANT. Again, I’m not really—so in terms of the impact that FEMA can have, we work with them on annexes as well as other documents, but not directly in terms of responding to different incidents like this.

Mr. KENNEDY. Would a drastic work force reduction at FEMA compromise the Office of Health Security’s ability to protect American people from the impacts of a biological attack?

Ms. GRANT. I believe that we should take that back and get with our colleagues at DHS to look at the complete impact that could have across our department.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you. Ms. Kelly, I represent, as I mentioned earlier, northern border community in western New York. The over 200 agricultural specialists who work at our ports of entry are essential in ensuring inbound goods crossing our Northern Border are free of dangerous pathogens. As you have testified today, what are some of the unique challenges that these agricultural specialists face at the Northern Border?

Mrs. KELLY. Thank you. The evolving threat landscape is, I would offer not specific to a region or a particular port, and that is because of the movement of trade. The complexities of this landscape are taken into consideration. The—certainly the trade and travel industry and that specific characterization of movement, but also the way in which an agricultural threat may impact the specific sector. As we look at a more granular level, such as the ports, then staffing levels, detection capabilities, infrastructure, all of these varying factors may characterize the complexity of that specific landscape.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you. I understand the CBP Port of Buffalo has a biological threat operations specialist. Will Buffalo receive a biological threat exclusion coordinator anytime soon?

Mrs. KELLY. Thank you for that question as well. We're very excited about the Biological Threat Exclusion Program and really appreciate the support of the program from Congress as well. With regards to our staffing models, they're informed by our resource allocation and work force staffing models which predict and take into consideration the type of operational needs.

Whether a particular port may have a threat exclusion coordinator or threat operations specialist is strictly determined or the decision, I should say, is informed by our staffing models.

Mr. KENNEDY. Understood. Ms. Kelly, are there gaps in current Federal law that could improve biosurveillance at our northern ports of entry?

Mrs. KELLY. There are certainly opportunities for the regulations to be updated to ensure that we can continue to deliver our mission and execute in an efficient and effective manner. Regulations that encourage accountability with regards to information sharing and collection can certainly ensure that we continue to make robust decisions at the ports of entry.

Mr. KENNEDY. I'm out of time. Chairman, if I could just add, Ms. Kelly, if there are opportunities for you to inform myself and the Chairman of legislation that could in fact improve this bio-surveillance, we are open to that. Thank you.

Chairman STRONG. Ranking Member's time has expired. I now recognize the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Van Epps, for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. VAN EPPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very important hearing. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. Thank you to the Trump administration and your work to keep our country safe. The food and agriculture sector is one of America's 16 designated critical infrastructure sectors. Because nearly 95 percent of U.S. farms are family-owned operations, our

farmers are especially vulnerable. An attack can rapidly cascade from farms to processors, distributors, and ultimately to grocery shelves nationwide. Agroterrorism isn't just an abstract threat. It is the deliberate introduction of plant or animal pathogens to cause economic damage, food shortages, panic, and strategic disruption.

We know this threat is real because agriculture is biologically vulnerable. Many high-consequence livestock diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease do not occur in the United States today. That means our herds lack natural immunity and an outbreak could rapidly—could spread rapidly before detection.

USDA has estimated that a major foot-and-mouth disease outbreak could cost the United States tens of billions of dollars in economic losses, devastate exports, and require the mass culling of animals to contain spread. A pathogen does not need to be weaponized in a sophisticated lab to cause catastrophic damage. It only needs to be introduced into a dense livestock or processing environment.

The modern threat environment compounds this risk. Terrorist networks, transnational criminal organizations, or state-linked actors could attempt to smuggle pathogens through ports of entry, mail systems, research collaborations, or contaminated feed and biological materials. Agriculture is uniquely exposed because farms are geographically dispersed, biosecurity practices vary, and the supply chain depends on continuous movement of animals, feed, and products. A coordinated biological attack on livestock or crops could simultaneously trigger food shortages, economic shock, and strain on military logistics, particularly in districts like mine that host Fort Campbell.

This is why the Trump administration's National Farm Security Action Plan is so important. It recognizes that preparedness is paramount. It requires robust bio-surveillance, real-time data sharing between USDA, DHS, FBI, and State officials.

Strong screening at ports of entry, laboratory capacity for rapid pathogen identification, and joint exercises that simulate deliberate biological introduction. If an adversary wants to undermine the United States without firing a shot, targeting our food supply is a strategic pathway. We cannot afford to treat that risk as secondary.

Ms. Kelly, what screening protocols are in place at ports of entry to detect intentionally concealed livestock or crop pathogens? How do those protocols differ from routine inspections designed to catch accidental pest or food violations?

Mrs. KELLY. Thank you for the question. Our capabilities start really at the National Targeting Center, where we are harmonizing our law enforcement data holdings with information that is collected and/or provided by our partners at the United States Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service. Excuse me.

This information is then shared with our front-line personnel to ensure that we can continue to strike the balance between facilitating trade and enforcing import regulations in a manner in which we can deliver meaningful consequences as well. With regards to malicious attempts, we have varying levels of operational policies and interagency agreements with several of our internal and external partners. These policies are underpinned by the National Inci-

dent Management System as well as the National Response Framework.

Mr. VAN EPPS. Thank you. Dr. Grant, when DHS or FBI identifies credible intelligence suggesting an adversary may target U.S. agriculture, how quickly does that information translate into heightened inspection posture at ports of entry?

Ms. GRANT. Thank you so much for that question. We work with our CBP colleagues through the National Targeting Center to disseminate that information to them. In addition, we would work with our State and locals through our health fusion centers to disseminate that information to the localities. So throughout those both mechanisms, we would get that information to the people that need it.

Mr. VAN EPPS. Great. Thank you. This is both for Mr. Allen and Ms. Kelly. How are Federal agencies ensuring that State agriculture departments and producers receive timely threat intelligence without creating unnecessary alarm?

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you for the question, sir. Our Animal Plant Health Inspection Service through our National Veterinarian Office works directly with State departments of agriculture to pass information on a regular and timely basis, including just last week we had the National State Directors of Agriculture here in the District of Columbia, and had days of face-to-face meetings with them.

Mr. VAN EPPS. Great. Thanks. Mr. Chairman, I'm out of time, so I yield back.

Chairman STRONG. I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions. The Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. We would ask the witnesses to respond to these in writing. Pursuant to committee rule VII(E), the hearing record will be held open for 10 days.

Without objection, this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:49 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN DALE W. STRONG FOR SUZETTE KELLY

Question 1a. At a previous hearing of this subcommittee devoted to this topic, witnesses noted that there is no consolidated resource addressing vulnerabilities and more importantly, mitigation tactics, pertaining to food security practices and threats to agriculture.

What current information-sharing practices do your agencies employ with other relevant agencies and especially with private-sector stakeholders, including academia and industry, and do you believe that a single vetted resource of information could help to improve best practices on the ground?

Answer. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employs a multi-faceted approach to information sharing with other relevant agencies and private-sector stakeholders, including academia and industry. CBP has provided proactive briefings to other relevant agencies, including Fusion Center Health Analysts, to enhance awareness of biological threats and share information on the deceptive tactics used to import biological materials. Furthermore, CBP proactively engages with academia and industry to mitigate agricultural and biological threats by offering essential import and export compliance guidance, promoting best practices to enhance regulatory awareness, and disseminating comprehensive education on current and emerging risks. CBP's National Targeting Center (NTC) maintains global partnerships to identify and dismantle illicit networks before they reach U.S. borders. The NTC fulfills a critical role in improving situational awareness among international and industry stakeholders through on-site liaison officers. CBP also maintains a cadre of liaisons embedded with select State agricultural offices in California, Texas, and Florida that foster awareness of threats to the agricultural sector, ensuring the interests of the various organizations are met. CBP provides operational perspective as an active participant and member of the New World screwworm One Health Coordination Unit. In an effort to proactively ensure the safety of high-interest events, such as 2026 FIFA World Cup, CBP is proactively engaging with appropriate representatives to provide import guidance for blood and urine samples, thereby strengthening compliance measures in preparation for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. A singular vetted resource or streamlined information-sharing mechanism intended to enable robust sharing of information and sustain awareness of biological threats can enhance situational awareness, improve decision making, standardize best practices, enable efficient response times and support training and education. CBP currently leverages the Homeland Security Information Network to securely disseminate immediate operational information amongst a vast network of Federal, State, local, Tribal, territorial, international, and private-sector partners, thereby enhancing border security, supporting collaborative efforts against illicit activities, and fostering interagency cooperation.

Question 1b. In your opinion, if such a resource were to exist, what would be the best way to go about creating it, and how could relevant departments and agencies cooperate with each other to assemble this document or database?

Answer. Existence of such a resource or mechanism relies upon defining the scope and content for development of this resource or mechanism, technology platform, governance and maintenance, and interagency cooperation. Holding the agencies accountable for information sharing through appropriate legislation, resources, and funding may enable delivery of this resource.

Question 2. Ms. Kelly, CBP plays an important role at our Nation's borders and ports of entry to detect and intercept harmful pathogens and biological materials from entering our Nation.

How does CBP work with its partners in national laboratories, including the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center and Plum Island Animal Disease Center which are operated by DHS S&T, as well as other regional animal

and plant diagnostic laboratories, to conduct testing of biological threats which CBPAS detect and interdict?

Answer. The role of CBP Agriculture Specialists (CBPAS) is to prevent the entry of plant and animal pests, pathogens, and diseases. Interceptions of pests and non-compliant biological materials are transferred to the custody of the responsible regulating agency, such as the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or an investigating agency, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation. CBP does not directly facilitate the transfer of interceptions to diagnostic laboratories or conduct testing of biological threats which CBPAS detect and interdict. CBP defers to DHS Science & Technology for specific details related to National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center and Plum Island Animal Disease Center.

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN DALE W. STRONG FOR MATT ALLEN

Question 1. At a previous hearing of this subcommittee devoted to this topic, witnesses noted that there is no consolidated resource addressing vulnerabilities and more importantly, mitigation tactics, pertaining to food security practices and threats to agriculture.

What current information-sharing practices do your agencies employ with other relevant agencies and especially with private-sector stakeholders, including academia and industry, and do you believe that a single vetted resource of information could help to improve best practices on the ground?

Answer. USDA, as the "People's Department," has maintained a proud tradition of working closely with academia and producers to promote the latest scientific understandings and agricultural practices that keep U.S. agriculture the most productive in the world and protects it from intentional and unintentional threats.

USDA carries out its information-sharing activities primarily through its role as Co-Sector Risk Management Agency for the Food and Agriculture Critical Infrastructure sector, and co-chair for the Food and Agriculture Sector Government Council (GCC) a responsibility shared with the Food and Drug Administration. The GCC includes academia, State, local, Tribal and territorial members as well as Federal partners. The GCC acts as the counterpart and partner to the private industry-led Food and Agriculture Sector Coordinating Council (SCC) in the planning and coordination of activities to ensure the resilience of the Nation's food and agriculture system.

USDA has not found the lack of a single vetted resource of information addressing vulnerabilities and mitigation tactics preventing the implementation of mitigations across the sector.

Question 2. In your opinion, if such a resource were to exist, what would be the best way to go about creating it, and how could relevant departments and agencies cooperate with each other to assemble this document or database?

Answer. USDA does not currently recommend an additional database, as we currently coordinate across the Federal departments and agencies to address the most pressing threats to the Food and Agriculture Sector. An effective, whole-of-Government effort to secure all 16 critical infrastructure sectors and interdependences happens with CISA as the National coordinator, providing strategic guidance and assessing cross-sector risk and vulnerabilities.

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN DALE W. STRONG FOR JEFF COOPER

Question 1a. At a previous hearing of this subcommittee devoted to this topic, witnesses noted that there is no consolidated resource addressing vulnerabilities and more importantly, mitigation tactics, pertaining to food security practices and threats to agriculture.

What current information-sharing practices do your agencies employ with other relevant agencies and especially with private-sector stakeholders, including academia and industry, and do you believe that a single vetted resource of information could help to improve best practices on the ground?

Answer. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) shares data, information on modeling and characterization capabilities, and knowledge products on threats and risks to the food and agriculture sector with relevant DHS components (e.g., Office of Health Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency) and interagency government stakeholders (e.g., the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency) to support planning and preparation efforts. S&T shares the modeling and characterization information through annual information sessions, monthly newsletters, and ad-hoc presentations of new data and modeling results with stakeholders and subject-matter experts. The data, information, and

modeling are generated by S&T activities as well as integrated from sources across the departments, agencies, academia, and industry. Additionally, the Probabilistic Analysis for National Threats Hazards and Risk team operates an on-line Hazard Knowledge Management System, that enables the sharing of data, model results, and software tools—providing partners with access to the most recent technical information that S&T has related to chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear materials threats to both human health and the food and agriculture sector. There are currently For Official Use Only and Classified versions which are available to authorized users within the U.S. Government. S&T contributes updates on on-going research and relevant risk models in biannual joint meetings, as appropriate, of the Food and Agriculture Sector coordinating councils. The meetings facilitate information exchanges between the Government Coordinating Council and the Sector Coordinating Council, which includes industry and academic representatives.

Single vetted resource of information: There is certainly some benefit to establishing a single, centralized resource that would enhance information sharing among multiple partners, but it also may present unintended consequences like delays in disseminating information. By centralizing data, modeling results, and technical updates into one platform, stakeholders across government, academia, and industry could access timely and relevant information more efficiently, improving coordination, reducing redundancies, and supporting collective preparedness and response efforts. This idea merits additional study and coordination with the interagency and the Office of Management and Budget. To ensure proper information security, the system would need to provide tiered access, allowing users to view only information appropriate to their clearance level and demonstrated need to know. Any centralized resource would be implemented consistent with applicable Federal research security, and foreign investment risk-management frameworks, in coordination with the appropriate interagency partners. This approach would safeguard Classified and Sensitive data while facilitating effective information sharing among authorized stakeholders.

Question 1b. In your opinion, if such a resource were to exist, what would be the best way to go about creating it, and how could relevant departments and agencies cooperate with each other to assemble this document or database?

Answer. Should such a resource exist, we recommend creating a working group to develop a plan for implementing consolidated information sharing across appropriate agencies. This group could inventory and leverage existing solutions, enabling efficient access to data, modeling results, and technical resources for all stakeholders. By coordinating efforts through this working group, we could enhance collaboration and ensure timely dissemination of critical information.

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN DALE W. STRONG FOR ASHLEY GRANT

Question 1a. At a previous hearing of this subcommittee devoted to this topic, witnesses noted that there is no consolidated resource addressing vulnerabilities and more importantly, mitigation tactics, pertaining to food security practices and threats to agriculture.

What current information-sharing practices do your agencies employ with other relevant agencies and especially with private-sector stakeholders, including academia and industry, and do you believe that a single vetted resource of information could help to improve best practices on the ground?

Answer. The Office of Health Security (OHS) shares information with Federal, State, local, Tribal, territorial, private-sector, and academic organizations by participating in established food, agriculture, and public health forums, supporting the integration of State and local health intelligence analysts into their State and local fusion centers, and sponsoring training and exercises focused on threats to the food, agriculture, and public health sectors.

For example, OHS participates in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "U.S. One Health Coordination Unit," which launched in 2024 as a Federal-level coordination mechanism focused on zoonotic diseases. OHS also regularly participates in Government Coordinating Councils and corresponding Sector Coordinating Councils, including those related to the food and agriculture sector, managed through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

OHS also supports the integration of State and local health analysts into their fusion centers. This includes hosting a long-standing monthly meeting for these officials to share best practices, resources, and actionable information related to health security threats. OHS also sponsors individual security clearances for appropriate State and local officials to access relevant, Classified health and medical intelligence information through these fusion center networks.

OHS has developed and sponsored discussion-based exercises focused on agroterrorism and other threats to food and agriculture supply chain for State and local, Tribal, territorial, and private-sector partners. These tabletop exercises include participants from industry and academia to ensure all relevant parties are engaged in the conversation. For example, OHS, in coordination with the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Interior, and Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recently hosted a tabletop exercise in El Paso, Texas, focused on a coordinated whole-of-Government response to New World screwworm. OHS has also delivered training to private-sector partners on the lawful importation of biological substances to thwart the illegal transfer of dangerous pathogens or genetically-modified organisms into the United States.

There is benefit to establishing a single resource of information. However, it is important to be mindful of any unintended impacts such as delays in production and/or distribution of that information. This concept should be analyzed further including through engagement with Federal interagency partners.

Question 1b. In your opinion, if such a resource were to exist, what would be the best way to go about creating it, and how could relevant departments and agencies cooperate with each other to assemble this document or database?

Answer. This concept should be researched further across the interagency. In addition to ensuring that it does not inadvertently delay distribution of information, it should not duplicate or integrate any existing structures. Currently, Federal and non-Federal partners communicate and cooperate routinely on defending the Nation from threats to the U.S. food and agriculture sector.

Question 2a. Dr. Grant, OHS recently led a joint food security exercise pertaining to New World screwworm with USDA, Department of the Interior, and CDC.

What findings has OHS gleaned from this exercise, and what steps will it take to harden our Nation's defenses against this disease after having completed the joint exercise?

Answer. While the formal after-action report of key findings is still in development, exercise participants did identify several preliminary findings from the New World Screwworm Tabletop Exercise held in El Paso, TX, in January 2026.

- Both multi-agency and cross-sectoral coordination is critical to prepare for and defend against agricultural threats.
- Established plans, protocols, and structured notification processes support collaboration among Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies.
- Expanding education and outreach beyond traditional veterinary and health care partners and consistent public messaging would improve the coordinated response to New World screwworm.

Question 2b. At this time, are you aware if this exercise will inspire future inter-agency and interdepartmental exercises to combat other threats to food and agriculture beyond New World screwworm, and what lessons has OHS learned from conducting this exercise in formulating potential future exercises, including with regards to enhancing State, local, and private-sector outreach?

Answer. OHS heard from several attendees of the tabletop exercise that they are planning or intend to conduct a food and agriculture threat-related exercise in their own jurisdiction. Some participants mentioned this was their first agricultural threat exercise despite their relevant roles in responding to such an event, and the exercise highlighted the importance of practicing a coordinated response to such events.

The Federal Government has an important role in inspiring and appropriately supporting such exercises. As an additional resource, OHS is finalizing a cross-sector catastrophic exercise scenario catalog that should help State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners more efficiently plan and execute their own food, agriculture, and health care-related exercises to enhance preparedness. These exercise scenarios provide an opportunity to practice response roles, define shared responsibilities, and explore unique interdependencies that that may not be present in other exercise scenarios.