



Adequate Funding: The Essential Ingredient for Agrosecurity

A single incident of mad cow disease in December 2003 left many Americans wondering how vulnerable our food supply is to similar threats, whether natural or deliberate acts of terrorism. These concerns are justified.

A RAND Corporation report for the Secretary of Defense recently referred to the agriculture/food industry as “America’s soft underbelly” and concluded that the farming community and food sector are at high risk of “disruption and sabotage from deliberate bio-attacks.”

In addition to the obvious public health concerns, the RAND report states that an agrosecurity breach could cause severe economic damage to a \$1 trillion-per-year industry that comprises a sixth of the American economy.

Protecting Us against Natural and Introduced Threats

The Department of Homeland Security has identified agriculture and food systems as one of its top priorities. NASULGC universities are playing a crucial role in efforts to defend our food supply and production network and better protect such essential natural resources as our soil, water, air, plants, and animals. Some examples:

- **Diagnostic Network.** NASULGC institutions operate a network of plant and animal diagnostic laboratories that allow broad surveillance, rapid and accurate detection, and reporting of pathogens of national interest.
- **Surveillance training.** NASULGC schools also train people to recognize and report potential pathogens. This effort uses our extension system to quickly disseminate information to farmers, researchers, and others. The Internet-based Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) is the nexus of this network, delivering up-to-the-minute information about preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation of any potential outbreaks.

- **Law enforcement cooperation.** NASULGC institutions are currently working to expand rapid and sensitive testing capabilities and to improve communications among state detection laboratories and federal and state law enforcement agencies. This puts us at the forefront of a comprehensive and unified surveillance, reporting and response program.

Adequate Funding Is Absolutely Essential

These and other agrosecurity efforts are at a crucial juncture. The RAND report sets this out quite clearly:

Although the consequences of an agroterrorism attack are substantial, relatively little attention has been focused on the threat. Unfortunately, the agricultural and food industries are vulnerable to disruption, and the capabilities that terrorists would need for such an attack are not considerable. In the short-term and medium-term, a series of targeted initiatives could improve the current situation.

Agrosecurity Funding Increases Justified

NASULGC’s agrosecurity requests for FY 2005 are set forth below. The security of our food supply – and protection of the air, water, soil, plants and animals used in its production – is a matter of grave and growing concern to us all. The president’s budget responds to this well-justified anxiety, and Congress should add its concurrence.

Agriculture Appropriations Bill

- Animal & Plant Diagnostic Networks..... \$30.0 m
- Higher Ed. Agrosecurity Education \$5.0 m

Homeland Security Appropriations Bill

- University Centers of Excellence \$70.0 m

NASULGC represents 213 American universities and has members in all 50 states, D.C. and the U.S. territories. For more information about this fact sheet, see: www.nasulgc-bac.com or call Fred Hutchison at 202.551.1440.