



# The Transformation and Continuing Needs of Agrosecurity

In late 2004, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson spoke about how easy it would be for a terrorist to compromise our nation's food supply. He is right that while our food production and distribution system is the safest in the world, there are myriad ways to harm it because it is so vast and complex. Indeed, as the Rand Corporation pointed out in a major study last year, agrosecurity may be the "soft underbelly" of our overall homeland security.

But Secretary Thompson neglected to point out that we are now equipped with a stronger capacity than ever to diagnose and respond rapidly to food-borne disease outbreaks that could threaten our public health and economy, though that capacity has only recently — especially since September 11, 2001 — undergone a dramatic restructuring.

## A TRANSFORMATION

Since 9/11, there has been a growing recognition among leadership at the local, state, and national levels that agrosecurity is an essential part of our homeland security and that the nation's land-grant universities and their networks of research programs and extension programs, which provide education to producers, consumers and researchers about newly arrived diseases to the research community, can play a critical role, too.

With more federal support from agrosecurity, many new initiatives at land-grant institutions have been put into place in only the last two years, for example:

- With coordination by the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, land-grant universities have created the National Plant Diagnostic Network (NPDN) and its counterpart, the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). These networks of laboratories and experts can, more rapidly than ever, identify dangerous pathogens that threaten crops or livestock and give county extension agents, growers, veterinarians, processors and others the information they need to head off problems before they become widespread.

- In 2004, the Department of Homeland Security selected and funded two "Centers of Excellence," consortia led by the University of Minnesota and Texas A&M University and comprised of resources from many other land-grant institutions to tackle foreign animal and zoonotic diseases (animal diseases that can transfer to humans), such as foot and mouth disease, Rift Valley fever, Avian influenza, and Brucellosis. They are developing strategies for post-harvest food protection and to ensure that everyone at every point in the food supply chain is equipped with the necessary information and protocols during an outbreak.

The Extension Disaster Education Network, or EDEN, a collaborative, nationwide effort by the Cooperative Extension Service, improves the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters of all kinds.

Agriculture and veterinary schools around the country are broadening their curricula to include agrosecurity education and working hard to encourage more students (among them future researchers) to enter this vital discipline.

## AGROSECURITY FUNDING INCREASES STILL CRITICAL

In spite of this relatively quick, quiet, and widespread transformation within the agricultural research, extension, and education community, there is still much more to know about how best to arm ourselves against threats to our food supply. Additional funding from the federal government is essential to maintain the infrastructure that allows us to be proactive and responsive.

### AGRICULTURE AND DHS APPROPRIATIONS REQUESTS FOR FY 2006

- Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative.....\$30.0 m
- Agrosecurity Education .....\$5.0 m
- University-Based Centers of Excellence.....\$70.0 m