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Research for Policy

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Agroterrorism—Why We're Not Ready: A Look at the Role of Law Enforcement

This Research for Policy is based on "Defining Law Enforcement's Role in Protecting American Agriculture from Agroterrorism," by Terry Knowles, James Lane, Gary Bayens, Nevil Speer, Jerry Jaax, David Carter, and Andra Bannister, final report to the National Institute of Justice, December 2005, NCJ 212280, available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/212280.pdf.

Terrorists seeking to strike a blow at the U.S. economy need look no further than the Nation's heartland for a "soft" target. An agroterrorist attack could dramatically impact many aspects of American life, including local law enforcement, which—especially in rural areas—is financially and strategically unprepared to respond.

Agricultural experts say that today they are most concerned about the intentional introduction of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) into the food supply. Twenty times more infectious than smallpox, FMD causes painful blisters on the tongues, hooves, and teats of cloven-hoofed animals (like cows, pigs, goats, and deer), rendering them unable to walk, be milked, eat, and drink. Although people generally cannot contract FMD, they can carry the virus in their lungs up to 48 hours and transmit it to animals. The animal-to-animal airborne-transmission range of FMD is 50 miles.

The introduction of FMD in the United States—with its generally open and difficult-to-protect farms, fields, and feedlots—would require the mass slaughter of animals and the disposal of potentially millions of animal carcasses. It could halt the domestic and international sale of meat and meat products for months or even years. Based on the FMD outbreak in the United Kingdom in 2001, researchers estimate that an attack against the American livestock industry could cost taxpayers up to $60 billion.[1]

Who Would Lead the Response?

Many believe that public health officials would lead the response to an agroterrorism attack, but this might not be the case. The laws of most States require that such an event be handled as a crime scene investigation, giving law enforcement primary responsibility. Ill-equipped to handle the magnitude of responsibilities that would

follow an act of agroterrorism, local police departments would be pushed to the limit.

Research points to the first priority of local law enforcement after an agroterrorist attack: establishing and enforcing a 6-mile radius quarantine (113 square miles) around the point of origin to control the spread of the virus. The second priority would be to set up statewide roadblocks to enforce stop-movement orders. Such a tremendous effort—requiring that all vehicles coming into or going out of the impacted State be stopped and inspected—would require a coordinated response by local, State, and Federal officials.

Evidence, including tissue from infected animals, would have to be collected. All cloven-hoofed animals (both domestic and wild) within the affected area would have to be destroyed and disposed of. A full-scale criminal investigation would have to be launched, including the identification, apprehension, and prosecution of suspects.

Preventing an Attack

Because terrorists rely on a lack of preparedness, law enforcement agencies should start now to develop a plan for preventing an agroterrorism attack—and the interruption of basic services, civil and emotional stress, and public health concerns that

This 21-month study was conducted through a partnership among the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, the Ford County (Kansas) Sheriff's Department, and the National Agriculture Biosecurity Center at Kansas State University; findings were based, in part, on field surveys and interviews with law enforcement, livestock producers, meat packers, truckers, feedlot managers, researchers, politicians, and animal health officials. The research also included two agroterrorist simulation exercises in Kansas.

In May 2006, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) held a regional planning meeting on preventing and responding to a bioterrorism attack on the Nation's agriculture industry. The meeting—which grew out of NIJ's research on defining the role of law enforcement in protecting American agriculture from bioterrorism—brought together key law enforcement, animal health, and homeland security officials from nine Midwestern States.

Officials rated their State's preparedness in preventing an agroterrorism attack and discussed ways to improve the response, should an attack occur. One of the most vital topics concerned coordination among law enforcement and veterinary and animal health authorities, within the State and across State borders.

likely would follow. On the local level, law enforcement agencies bear a responsibility for intelligence gathering, including the review of Federal reports on bioterrorism threats. For example, in an effort to minimize the potential of an epidemic, the World Organization on Animal Health coordinates information on animal diseases (see www.oie.int). Local jurisdictions are also in the best position to conduct vulnerability studies of area farms and feedlots.

Specialized training for law enforcement is needed. Joint planning and operational exercises also must take place for agencies to be ready to respond to such a crime, if it occurs. Partnerships—the best way to prevent an agroterrorism attack and the only way to contain one—must be created among local farmers, truckers, feedlot owners, and other critical members of the food-supply chain. A working relationship between criminal investigators and veterinarians and animal and plant health inspectors must be established.

A New Security Paradigm

The paradigm for protecting the Nation's food supply changed after 9/11, focusing attention on areas that require greater security measures. Research funded by NIJ recommends that, to protect the Nation's 2.1 million farms, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other intelligence-gathering

The Ford County Sheriff's Department in Dodge City, Kansas, in collaboration with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, developed a neighborhood watch/community policing program called Agro-Guard. Law enforcement and livestock producers participate in the program in an effort to identify threats to agriculture before they become incidents. Agro-Guard participation involves reporting suspicious activity, posting warning signs, holding community meetings on law enforcement and animal health issues, creating a public-access Web site, and developing emergency response procedures.

agencies work with local and State law enforcement and the livestock industry to develop a national plan to prevent, respond to, and ultimately recover from an incident of agroterrorism.

Notes

1. See *Economic Impact of a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) Outbreak Across the United States,* U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, 2004.

Additional Reading

Chalk, P. (2004). *Hitting America's soft underbelly: The threat of deliberate biological attacks against the U.S. agriculture and food industry.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Jaax, J. (2002, August 20). Sworn Testimony: *How effectively is the federal government assisting state and local governments in preparing for a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack?* Congressional field hearing, House Committee on Government Reform, Abilene, KS (http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/useftp.cgi?IPadress=162.140.64.88&filename=88193.wais&directory=/diskc/wais/data/107_house_hearings).

RAND. (2003). *Agroterrorism: What is the threat and what can be done about it?* Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute.

Waters, A. (2005, May 3). *Foot and mouth disease outbreak in Great Britain: A case study.* Formal presentation, International Symposium on Agroterrorism, Kansas City, MO (www.fbi-isa.org/library/Waters_files/frame.htm).

The researchers' recommendations for strengthening America's defense against agroterrorism include:

- Development of a national law enforcement plan, including Federal funding of preventive measures to be developed by local law enforcement.
- Intelligence-gathering by local law enforcement, including community policing in conjunction with the agriculture industry.
- Training, at the regional level, of local law enforcement personnel to enforce stop-movement orders and quarantine areas in the event of an attack.

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