Testimony of

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Office of Health Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

BEFORE

House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives

ON

"Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism: Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism, Part II: Assessing Federal Government Efforts"

February 11, 2026
Washington, D.C.

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 frontline 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.

Testimony of

Jeff Cooper
Program Manager

Science and Technology Directorate
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

BEFORE

House Committee on Homeland Security
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U.S. House of Representatives

ON

"Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism: Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism, Part II: Assessing Federal Government Efforts"

February 11, 2026
Washington, D.C.

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 tradeoffs 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.

Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism, Part II: Assessing Federal Government Efforts

February 11, 2026

Statement for the Record

Matt Allen

Director, Office of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Before the

United States House of Representatives

Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology

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 online 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 online portal is part of a broader effort to strengthen AFIDA enforcement and protect American farmland. This online 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) #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 towards 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 ongoing 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.

Testimony
of

Suzette P. Kelly
Deputy Executive Director
Performing the Duties of the Executive Director
Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison
Office of Field Operations
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Regarding a Hearing
on

"Surveying the Threat of Agroterrorism, Part II: Assessing Federal Government Efforts"

Before the

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology

February 11, 2026
Washington, DC

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[3] https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/suspending-duty-free-de-minimis-treatment-for-all-countries/
[4] https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aqi
[5] https://www.cbp.gov/document/stats/cbp-snapshot

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

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

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

Advanced Targeting Capabilities

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

Specialized Detection Capabilities and Mobile Technology

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

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

Collaboration with Government and Private-Sector Partners

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

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

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

[6] https://www.screwworm.gov

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

CBP's commitment to information sharing goes beyond internal training, extending to key industries and academic communities to strengthen awareness and compliance. Working with partner agencies, CBP engages not only with trade and transportation communities, but also with academic, research, and biopharmaceutical institutions to educate these sectors on agricultural and biological threats, share required import and export compliance measures, and promote best practices. For example, CBP maintains robust pest exclusion programs centered on some of the most devastating pests, including the Flighted Spongy Moth Complex or Spongy Moth[7] and Khapra Beetle,[8] as well as risks associated with pests in wood packaging material and other contaminants.

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

Conclusion

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

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

[7] U.S. Department of Agriculture National Invasive Species Information Center, https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/terrestrial/invertebrates/flighted-spongy-moth-complex
[8] U.S. Department of Agriculture National Invasive Species Information Center, https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/terrestrial/invertebrates/khapra-beetle