Defending Against the Threat

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After a long, hard day, you're really hungry. Imagine: tender slices of juicy roast beef, a pile of creamy mashed potatoes and butter, crisp-fresh green beans and for dessert a slice of warm apple pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Thanks to American agriculture, we are able to enjoy this wide variety of delicious foods; but could a meal that seems to be picture perfect be flawed by terrorism? Unfortunately, in today's world, threats of terrorism against the United States are a reality. American agriculture could be a target; therefore affecting our food supply. American agriculturists however, are working hard to decrease the vulnerability of our vast system; they are on the front-line of defending our nation from agro terrorism.

Agro terrorism is classified as a threat to plants and animals, through biological agents, diseases and pests. The United States Department of Agriculture, the USDA has pinpointed a few of the most likely cases that America could face. They include wheat and soybean rust, as well as some types of wood boring beetles. Other examples include Salmonella, Ebola, and Anthrax. However, these are not the only threats that could arise. Intelligence has clued the United States that the potential exists to create many other diseases that could contaminate our plants and animals. We cannot allow even one of these diseases to invade our food supply. The food could become tainted, we could be faced with a shorter supply of food, and in turn our economy would suffer. We must determine where the disease could enter, what preventative measures to take, and how to respond.

Agriculture is a bustling system of production. It is important that we are aware of how our system could become contaminated. A disease could enter through the feed that we give our
livestock or maybe the vaccines that we use to treat them. Or maybe it could involve the chemicals and seeds that we use to produce crops. It could possibly enter during the storing and processing stages, or still yet it could enter during the transporting of agricultural products. At all levels, American agriculturists strive to deliver a safe and quality product to the dinner tables of not only our country, but around the world. We take very seriously our responsibility to follow regulations and guidelines in all areas of production. Agro terrorism is an important issue that the local, state, and national levels are taking on with a strong determination, with one goal in mind to keep the food supply safe.

On the local level, farmers have a major responsibility. As the producers of crops and livestock, they must be aware and prepared for possible threats. One efficient way to achieve this is to develop a Farm Emergency Plan, which would include specific details on how to approach emergency situations. This plan would include contact numbers of the farmer's veterinarian, the local USDA office, the state's department of agriculture and the local law enforcement agency. Another element of the plan would include specific locations of shutoff valves and other facilities. These detailed plans and instructions would allow for a quick reaction in the event of an agro terrorism emergency.

At the state level, agricultural offices play an important role in the success of the local farmer. State departments of agriculture are beginning to maintain inventories of seed, feed and fertilizer that are used within each county. They are also working to maintain a county database of all disaster reportings. State departments are offering local veterinarians educational seminars about foreign animal diseases. According to the USDA Homeland Security Efforts report, "The USDA has provided $43 million to states, universities, and tribal lands to increase homeland security prevention, detection, and response efforts."
There are five major departments that are working to place programs and regulations into motion for not only the local and state level, but the national level as well. They include the USDA, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security. At our nation's borders, the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration are upgrading surveillance and inspection on all imports that we receive from other areas of the world. They are also working to develop a national animal identification system, in order to have a census on livestock within the United-States. Another major effort is the development of the-24/7 National Consumer Complaint Monitoring System which would be beneficial in detecting an attack early. The USDA is encouraging businesses that are involved with the storing, processing and transporting of agricultural products to become knowledgeable and actively involved in these efforts. APHIS has created a Rapid Response Team that is trained to act immediately in case of a disease outbreak. The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have been working with 3000 APHIS employees to assist with regulations. As these agencies work together as one unit they provide guidance to all 50 states.

It is vital that we keep the food supply safe. We can help to ensure this by becoming educated about the risk at hand. By taking every necessary precaution we will be able to maintain consumer confidence and continue our trading relationships with other countries. Making food safety today's priority will help to decrease the risk and damage of an agro terrorist attack. American agriculturists have a heavy load on their shoulders; however with the dedication that each area of production exerts towards their responsibility, agro-terrorism can be defeated. So, go ahead enjoy your breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
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