

**Testimony of
Senator Jim Talent
Before the Senate
Committee on Governmental Affairs
Hearing to Assess the Threat to America's Breadbasket
November 19, 2003**

Madam Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing on such an important issue. It is important to raise the visibility of the question of food security. Contrary to what some believe, food doesn't come from a grocery store. It comes from farms in the heartland and potato farms in Maine and a threat to our food security affects us all.

Also thank you for allowing me to address your committee. I am chairman of the Agriculture Sub-Committee for Marketing, Inspection and Promotion, which has jurisdiction over inspection and certification of agriculture products.

I want to start with a note to consumers – its one you've probably heard before. Our nation's food supply is the safest, most abundant and affordable food supply in the world. That was true before September 11th and that is true today. I am confident in our government's ability to work with industry and our research institutions to protect the commodities that our farmers and ranchers produce.

However, since September 11, there is a need for heightened vigilance to prevent foreign agricultural pests and diseases from being deliberately introduced in the United States. The idea of terrorists deciding to create food-related threat is something new that we must address.

I compliment the efforts of each segment of the food industry, from farmers to retailers, to boost security measures. However, regardless of the intent behind a foreign pest or disease entering the US, it would still have a major, negative impact on our nation's economy.

Apart from the threat to safety, the economy is at stake. Nationally, agriculture sales account for 13% of the GNP and nearly one-sixth of all jobs in the US are related to agriculture. This amount is even greater in parts of the country like Missouri and the Midwest region.

Recent international instances have given us a window to see just what happens to the economy when you have a breach of biosecurity:

- In 1997, Classical Swine Fever devastated Netherlands pork producers and their industry costing roughly \$2.3 billion in economic damages.
- Also in 1997 – Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) broke out in Taiwan costing roughly \$8 billion in economic damages.
- Just two years ago in the European Union, FMD destroyed their livestock industry and cost roughly \$9.5 billion in economic damages. That number is still rising.

Experts have identified a few points to consider when determining the economic impact of an animal or plant disease outbreak: geography, timing and strategy.

- Geography - Where and over what area will the outbreak occur?
 - We all know that the US agriculture industry, especially the livestock sector is highly concentrated. Large groups of animals share close quarters on the farm, during transportation and at the processing facilities.
 - A disease could move quickly between herds and paralyze our agriculture industry.
 - Additionally, if something were to occur in the Midwest, the impacts would be even more devastating. This is yet another reason why I appreciate the Chairwoman for holding this hearing.
- Timing - How quickly will outbreaks be detected and dealt with?
 - In the EU, it took them two weeks to discover FMD in their domestic livestock.
 - Obviously, the more quickly the disease is detected and eradication efforts get underway, the negative impact will be minimized.
 - In the event of a disease entering our domestic herds – we must have the networks in place to detect the disease and initiate the next steps to contain and eradicate the disease.
 - Farmers keep a watchful eye on herds. Any sign of sickness will get quick attention that immediately initiates a network lead by state veterinarians. This will also bring agriculture extension representatives and the vet schools into the process with research labs close at hand.

- Strategy - What strategy will be used to respond to the outbreak?
 - Our federal agencies should partner with each other, as well as, industry, universities, commodity groups and private research institutions.
 - The Universities represent an existing network for communications and research initiatives. The administration realizes that and DHS has a plan to work with these institutions to designate

I am confident that the remaining speakers will address these points in more detail, as well as the coordination between state, federal and local interests in the event of a breach of our nations biosecurity.

In closing, I want to point out some of the good work that is going on at the University of Missouri in an effort to address – geography, timing and strategy as it relates to food security. Missouri is smack in the middle of “America’s Bread Basket.”

Within the borders of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa is approximately 25 percent of the nation’s crop and grasslands and 20 percent of the livestock industry.

Bordering states make up a combination of 70 percent of American agriculture. Two major rivers traverse these states, moving substantial quantities of agricultural inputs and products destined for foreign markets. Additionally, the Kansas City Board of Trade is an active indicator of domestic and global agriculture.

Given this substantial agricultural base and the growing threat from agroterrorism, the University of Missouri took the lead in forming the Midwest alliance as a national research resource.

They have partnered with other universities and private research institutions to establish a research test bed oriented to facilitate the prevention, detection, response and communication to the Midwest, additionally, it could be directed to any region of the country. I have a detailed paper prepared by the University that explains the Alliance and the economic significance of the Midwest that I would like to submit for the record.

I look forward to continuing to address this issue together with this committee and in my subcommittee on the Senate Agriculture Committee.