



Urgent Funding Needed to Protect America's Food Supply from Terrorist Threats

A recent intelligence bulletin issued by the FBI to its field agents revealed that terrorist groups may use commonly available household products to create toxins to harm America's food supply. To address this urgent threat, Congress should make available \$10 million within the Homeland Security Appropriations bill for F.Y. 2004 for a cooperative agreement between the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Agriculture (USDA).

Nature of the Threat

As part of the war with Iraq, U.S. special operations forces destroyed a terrorist training center at Sagat, Iraq, located in a remote valley a mile from the Iran-Iraq border. This center was a terrorist camp used by the Islamic militant group Ansar al-Islam, which has some 700 members, including many al-Qaida terrorists. Shoes and other items found at Sagat were sent to an independent lab where they tested positive for ricin and botulinum.

These are only two of many known toxins that could be readily produced and easily used by terrorists to target croplands, livestock feedlots, poultry houses, and major food processing and distribution centers.

The Response

It is clear that the United States is ill-equipped at present to deal with the mass trauma that would result through introduction of toxins such as ricin and botulinum into our domestic food supply. This situation must be remedied through an intense program of research, teaching, and public outreach facilitated by a cooperative effort of the Departments of Homeland Security and Agriculture. To reach maximum efficacy at the earliest possible time, this cooperative effort must draw upon the established mechanisms in place through USDA that integrate

university research, education, and extension activities.

We Are Ready to Address the Threats

NASULGC urges Congress to provide \$10 million in the F.Y. 2004 Homeland Security Appropriations bill for a cooperative agreement between DHS and USDA. The purpose of this agreement is to address the urgent need for threat detection research, education, and extension related to agricultural bioterrorism: field crops; farm animals; food items in the processing or distribution chain; market-ready foods at the wholesale or retail level; and agricultural facilities, including processing plants, storage facilities, wholesale and retail food outlets, elements of the transportation infrastructure, and research laboratories.

Such research, and related education and extension activities, should be awarded competitively to Land-Grant institutions and other qualified universities and carried out in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture. USDA possesses the capabilities to IMMEDIATELY START-UP and manage this university-based program on behalf of the DHS without DELAY.



✓ Ricin is a toxin derived easily from castor beans. Although it is not always fatal, there is no known cure. If inhaled, ricin can cause death within 36 to 48 hours from failure of the respiratory and circulatory systems. Less than a pinpoint of ricin can kill a human if ingested, injected, or inhaled.



✓ Botulinum, if ingested, causes botulism, a muscle-paralyzing disease. Although botulism is not often fatal if treated promptly, the respiratory failure and paralysis that occur with severe botulism may require a patient to be on a ventilator for weeks, plus intensive medical and nursing care. What is so terrifying about this toxin is that as little as one billionth of a gram can cause a lethal reaction, making it the deadliest compound known to humans.

