



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

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

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For my home state of Mississippi, agriculture is the lifeblood of the economy. The vulnerability of our community to biological threats is not theoretical, but rather an existential threat to the livelihoods of thousands of families.

As our farmers already struggle with rising input costs and market volatility created by Donald Trump's tariffs, the added risk of agroterrorism could lead to irreversible, catastrophic economic damage. And while we recognize the threats posed by agroterrorism, it is important for today's hearing to also face the fact that the Trump administration continues to degrade our national security infrastructure, which has also affected our ability to detect and prevent biological threats.

The proposed budget cuts and ongoing staffing cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control represent a dangerous retreat from our Nation's biodefense infrastructure and significantly weaken our ability to detect and respond to agroterrorism threats before they can devastate our food supply. By gutting the very surveillance and emergency programs designed to monitor zoonotic diseases and agricultural pathogens, we are essentially leaving the gates open to those who would use biological agents to destabilize our economy and threaten public safety.

This vulnerability is compounded by Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) and hastily close the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Both actions further exacerbate the risk of biological diseases spreading by dismantling the international early-warning systems that provide us with critical intelligence on emerging global threats.

In the context of agroterrorism, our safety depends on global cooperation and the ability to stop an outbreak at its source. Without these partnerships, we are creating blind spots that put our domestic livestock and crops at unnecessary risk of intentional contamination. Lastly, I want to say that the Trump administration is actively dismantling the very agency we rely on when disasters, including biological events, happen: FEMA.

The administration is firing FEMA personnel and plans to eliminate half of the Agency's workforce. They are refusing to distribute critical counterterrorism grants and have injected an unprecedented level of chaos into the grants process. In doing so, they are effectively abandoning our State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners, leaving them defenseless because the White House would rather settle political scores than save lives. This systematic dismantling of our domestic response capabilities is not an isolated failure; it is a symptom of a broader, more dangerous agenda: Trump's degradation of our Nation's security.

What's more, our congressional colleagues are pushing legislation that rips FEMA out of DHS with no consideration of the detrimental effects on the Department, including fracturing FEMA's counterterrorism responsibilities and crippling of the Agency's mandate for continuity of government.

This Committee should be taking an active role in the conversation on FEMA's future and the Trump administration's ongoing harm to our Nation's security. I hope it will do so immediately.

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