



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: Perspectives on Food, Agriculture, and
Veterinary Defense***
September 16, 2025

An attack on our food or farm systems could spread disease, devastate communities, and shake the public's faith in government and food safety. In my home State, Mississippi, agriculture sustains both livelihoods and local economies, so the fallout of an agroterrorism attack would be especially difficult to overcome.

Although our Nation has not yet suffered an agroterrorism attack, adversaries have studied the possibility—and just a few months ago, foreign nationals were charged with smuggling a dangerous agricultural toxin into our country.

Even viruses such as COVID-19 and H5N1 avian flu show us just how vulnerable we are to new outbreaks. The lesson is clear: ignoring this threat until after disaster strikes would be a profound mistake.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration is moving us in the wrong direction—undermining emergency management, dismantling public health capacity, and eroding the safeguards that keep our food supply secure.

The Trump administration has repeatedly sought to eliminate or drastically downsize FEMA—the lead Federal agency for responding to emergencies, including biological and agricultural attacks—without offering any plan to help States shoulder the enormous responsibilities that would fall on them. That is irresponsible, because no State has the capacity to manage a large-scale biological or agroterrorism incident on its own.

Compounding the problem, the Trump administration has charged one official—who has no background in disaster response—with running both FEMA and DHS's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office. Running FEMA requires full-time leadership and deep emergency management expertise.

FEMA also administers preparedness grant programs meant to help States and communities prevent and respond to acts of terrorism—but the Trump administration is mismanaging those too. These programs help fund training for first responders, specialized technology for detecting biological threats, and lifesaving medical countermeasures like antibiotics and antidotes.

Yet for months, the Trump administration withheld information from States and localities about how much funding they would receive, when it would arrive, and what restrictions would be placed on the funds—in clear violation of statutory deadlines for sharing this information.

At the same time, the administration is hollowing out the Department of Health and Human Services. Cuts to CDC and FDA are eliminating laboratories and inspectors that form the backbone of our food safety net. States cannot absorb these losses—they are already stretched too thin.

The Agency that leads Federal coordination of bioterrorism and public health emergencies—the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response—has been without a leader for over six months. And experts have been sounding the alarm that the loss of USAID is devastating both global health preparedness efforts and U.S. national security. That is unacceptable in this time of rising threats.

Finally, we cannot let politics derail vaccines. Vaccines save lives—whether shielding us from outbreaks like avian flu or ensuring we are ready if an agroterrorism attack occurs. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has led reckless attacks on proven medical protections, spreading misinformation that weakens the public's confidence in science and puts Americans at risk. By undermining vaccines, he isn't just endangering public health—he is weakening America's ability to defend itself against biological threats.

The stakes are high. Protecting America's farms, food, and families from agroterrorism requires clear Federal leadership, stable funding, and public trust in science.

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