

WORLD FOOD PRIZE SYMPOSIUM October 2001

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Thank you, Floyd. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I appreciate this opportunity and am grateful to the World Food Prize Foundation for giving me this opportunity to tell you just a bit more about the National Research Council study that Dr. Horn mentioned.

The title of the study is “Intentional Biological Threats to Agricultural Plants and Animals in the U.S.” The study, as Dr. Horn indicated, is directed by the National Research Council’s Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources, and it’s sponsored by the USDA Agricultural Research Service, Dr. Horn’s agency.

The origin of the study, or the genesis of it, grew out of a workshop held at the National Academy of Sciences in August of 1999. There were 35 people that participated in that workshop. They represented leaders from the federal government, from the intelligence community, the defense community, and from agriculture. They also included people from industry and a number of people from academia.

The purpose of the workshop was to advise the National Academy as to whether or not a study in this area targeted at the on-farm agriculture at plants and animal stage was warranted. At the end of that day-long workshop, it was concluded that it was clear that the U.S. is vulnerable, U.S. agriculture is vulnerable at that stage. It also seemed apparent that the consequences could be significant and national if attacks were mounted to exploit those vulnerabilities. It was clear that there are people in the world, individuals in the world, who have strong motivation to do something like this. And it was also absolutely clear, and as we’ve heard discussed repeatedly by people who went before me, that across the globe we have a number of threat agents that could be used in various ways, tailored to suit your resources and your objectives to exploit these vulnerabilities.

So there was a consensus then that the nation should be proactive in looking at attacks on agriculture in this way. I say “proactive” because another thing that came out at that workshop was that there have been no known attacks, terrorist attacks, intentional attacks using bio-threat agents on American agriculture at the plant and animal. ... indicated that we should be proactive, and we should look at protecting ourselves in this area.

So the National Research Council was advised to go ahead and put together, organize a study – sought a sponsor which was ultimately the Agricultural Research Service. And early his year in about February, the committee that is doing the study was put together. The committee has people with expertise from plant pathology, entomology, molecular biology, veterinary medicine, regulatory policy, public policy, public health, chemical engineering and economics.

The task of the committee is to identify strengths and weaknesses in the U.S. system to protect itself against intentional threats of this kind and the needs of that system, specifically,

looking both at the institutional capabilities or the organizational strengths and policies and collaborative networks that are in place and ought to be in place throughout the system. And by “throughout the system,” we mean from the farm to the local community officials, to the state and ultimately to the federal level. And secondly then to look at the use of science and technology as well as the needs in that area for this system. And finally to make recommendations for improvement.

As I said, the committee was established early this year. We’re at the information assessment and analysis stage. Our report will be published by next summer.

And I thank you again for this opportunity.