



November 18, 2003

Honorable Mark Pryor
Senate Governmental Affairs Committee
217 Russell Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Pryor:

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) is pleased that the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee is holding a hearing to discuss the threat of agroterrorism and the safety of the U.S. food supply. As partners in the federal system, we strongly support your ongoing efforts to enhance the safety and security of our nation's food supply and the agricultural production system which supports it.

We believe it is necessary to recommit to a common mission to better coordinate, plan and share resources in matters of both food safety and food security, including animal and plant health and measures to protect our borders. NASDA recently made recommendation to address the long-term restructuring of existing food protection efforts, such as improved coordination and information-sharing among food safety agencies at local, state and federal levels; and enhanced emergency preparedness and response. Our recommendations include specific action items to increase federal funding for state and local partners to: (1) apply standards for uniform food safety and security programs; (2) enhance inspection and testing activities; (3) expand food-borne illness surveillance systems; and (4) establish standard training and certification of all food safety officers nationwide.

NASDA has also released two state resource surveys which were conducted by our affiliate organization, the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO). One survey shows the amount and distribution of federal funding to states for counter-terrorism and food safety/security activities. While almost a billion dollars in federal funds were forwarded during FY03 to the states to strengthen preparedness for terrorism response, the survey shows that little has been directed to state food security. Less than one half of one percent of these total dollars has been earmarked for state readiness at the manufacturing, processing, distribution, storage and retail levels for food.

The second survey, "State Food Safety Resource Survey," documents the extent of food safety regulatory activity conducted by state and local government agencies. In particular, the survey shows that food inspection programs at the state and local level receive less than 10 percent federal funding, yet they conduct more than 80 percent of the food establishment inspections in the United States.

Another important aspect in the protection of the U.S. food supply are measures that protect our borders from the introduction of plant and animal diseases and pests. The efficacy of agricultural inspections at points of entry is critical to the continued viability of the country's domestic agricultural sector. NASDA recently provided comments on the "One Face at the Border" initiative announced by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). When a plant or animal pest or disease is detected in this country, states expend tremendous resources eradicating the pest or disease. Given the impact agriculture has on many of our states' economies, the Department of Homeland Security must ensure their core mission includes agricultural protection. We have suggested that a new mindset for inspections must be developed by DHS that blends the core missions of agricultural inspectors, customs inspectors, and immigration inspectors together rather than trying to change one or two of their respective missions to be in line with an existing mission.



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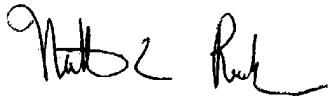
NASDA is a nonprofit association of public officials comprised of the Commissioners, Secretaries, and Directors of agriculture in the fifty states and four territories

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture represents the commissioners, secretaries, and directors of the state departments of agriculture in the fifty states and four territories. We stand ready to work with you to achieve our mutual goals in developing effective strategies to safeguard our agricultural production tools and strengthen homeland security.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Hugoson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Gene Hugoson
NASDA President
Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Rudgers". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "N" and "R".

Nathan Rudgers
Chairman, NASDA Food and Agriculture Security Task Force
Commissioner, New York Department Agriculture and Markets