

**Testimony of the
National Pork Producer Council**

On

**Germs, Viruses, and Secrets:
Government Plans to Move Exotic Disease Research
to the Mainland United States**

Before

**United States House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

**May 22, 2008
Washington, D.C.**

Introduction

The National Pork Producers Council is an association of 43 state pork producer organizations. NPPC serves as the voice in Washington, D.C., for the nation's pork producers.

The U.S. pork industry represents a significant value-added activity in the agriculture economy and the overall U.S. economy. Nationwide, more than 67,000 pork producers marketed more than 104 million hogs in 2007, and those animals provided total gross receipts of \$15 billion. Overall, an estimated \$21 billion of personal income, from sales of more than \$97 billion, and \$34.5 billion of gross national product are supported by the U.S. hog industry. Economists Dan Otto and John Lawrence at Iowa State University estimate that the U.S. pork industry is directly responsible for the creation of nearly 35,000 full-time equivalent jobs and helps generate 515,000 indirect jobs. All told, the U.S. pork industry is responsible for more than 550,000 mostly rural jobs in the U.S.

The U.S. pork industry today provides 21 billion pounds of safe, wholesome and nutritious meat protein to consumers worldwide.

In fact, 2007 was the sixth consecutive year of record pork production in the United States.

Exports of pork also continue to grow. New technologies have been adopted and productivity has been increased to maintain the U.S. pork industry's international competitiveness. As a result, pork exports have hit new records for the past 16 years. In 2007, exports represented nearly 15 percent of production. This year, approximately 2.8 billion pounds of pork and pork products are expected to be exported at a value of \$4.1 billion.

Foreign Animal Diseases A Threat

To maintain its contribution to the economy and to continue to supply safe, nutritious, wholesome pork to consumers worldwide, the U.S. pork industry must rely on the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for protection from foreign animal diseases. This includes preventing the entry of pathogens via passengers and cargo through U.S. ports of entry, conducting diagnostic investigations on suspect cases of foreign animal disease, continuing research on foreign animal diseases, such as Foot and Mouth Disease, and developing better diagnostic tools and vaccines.

The Plum Island Animal Disease Center, located off the northeastern tip of New York's Long Island, has been the centerpiece of the United States' foreign animal disease diagnostic system. Its mission also includes research on and development of vaccines and treatments for foreign animal diseases. Training animal health professionals to recognize and diagnose foreign animal diseases is another critical element of the mission at the Plum Island facility. It is our understanding that the proposed National Bio and Agri-Defense Facility (NBAF) will continue to fulfill this mission.

Site NBAF On Mainland

Our industry believes it is time to move past the endless debate about whether to locate the facility on the mainland or maintain it on Plum Island. There is an urgent need to construct this facility; our industry is living on borrowed time until a new facility is built.

The U.S. pork industry believes the NBAF should be located on the mainland. In its current state, the facility on Plum Island cannot continue its mission of foreign animal disease research, diagnostics and education. While the environment on Plum Island is thought to be ideal from a risk mitigation standpoint, there are serious drawbacks to having the facility there. Constructing a new

facility on the island would be prohibitively more expensive than on the mainland, with operational costs increasing by at least 25 percent. These costs take away from funds that could be used for research and diagnostic work. It also has been difficult to recruit high-caliber scientists to Plum Island because of the area's high cost of living and inconvenience of "boating" to work every day.

NBAF will require world-class scientists to conduct research and diagnostic work, so the location needs to be appealing to these individuals. Additionally, local lodging and dining accommodations on and around Plum Island are very limited. This makes the area unattractive to visiting scientists and individuals involved in training programs. The local community also has been suspicious of work being done on the island. They have in the past opposed expansion of the facility. In 1999, local opponents and their congressional delegation prevented sheep from Vermont, thought to have a foreign animal disease, from being moved to the island for diagnostic purposes. USDA was forced to move the sheep to the less secure National Animal Disease Center in Ames, Iowa.

Several universities and their supporting cities and counties located in major livestock producing areas have asked to be considered for

the new location of NBAF. Our industry believes DHS needs to take a careful approach to choosing the location of the new facility.

Consider Risks To Proposed Sites

Five sites for the new NBAF are now under consideration, excluding the current Plum Island location. The facility has enormous importance to our industry, but it also has a high level of risk. Therefore, the location of the facility must be based on assessment of that risk. A prudent decision can be made only after completing a risk profile of the activities to be conducted in the facility. Such a profile would include:

- An assessment of susceptible animal populations that could be exposed to an outbreak should disease organisms escape from the facility.
- The capability of the Federal and state governments to quickly control and eradicate a disease.
- The environmental consequences and impact on wildlife populations of an outbreak.
- The economic consequences to the livestock industry if an outbreak were to occur.

The U.S. pork industry would not support building the facility at any of the proposed sites without a risk profile. In fact, we believe that measuring the activities against this risk profile should not exclude consideration of other sites.

We have confidence in the technology supporting the biosecurity of our U.S. laboratories, and their record of success is rather remarkable. The outbreak at England's Pirbright Laboratory, however, occurred because of a biosecurity breakdown. This breakdown highlighted the human component of applying technology and raised new concerns about the NBAF location. In spite of all the safeguards that can be built into the system, the risk of releasing a disease organism cannot be entirely eliminated. The risk of disease introduction needs to be the most important element of the location decision.

Scope Of Work Must Be Considered

Most of the current debate has focused on the location and cost of the facility, but very little has been said about the anticipated scope of work to be carried out at the NBAF. From our industry's perspective, it seems more prudent to define the capacity needed for the kinds of research and diagnostic work to be completed and to build the facility to meet those needs and objectives. Without

such an approach, our ability to meet long-term needs and objectives will be determined by the size and design of the facility rather than the needs and objectives themselves. The U.S. pork industry would request that DHS work with the animal agriculture industry to define that scope of work.

There are lessons to be learned from construction of USDA's new National Animal Disease Center in Ames, Iowa. The facility was designed to meet the anticipated needs of animal agriculture, as defined by the scope of work developed by USDA and the livestock industries. Unfortunately, the design was modified during construction to meet budget constraints. These modifications may limit the capability of the facility to meet the original scope of work. The second major lesson to be learned from the Ames facility is that new buildings, with high bio-containment levels, are more expensive to operate. Higher maintenance and utility costs have left the facility with insufficient operating funds, thereby limiting the purpose for which it was built.

NBAF Must Protect Animal Agriculture

The commitment by DHS for continued support to animal agriculture research and diagnostic work is just as important as the facility. NBAF is described to have a multi-disciplinary mission, focusing on human and animal health, particularly zoonotic diseases. While we support the need for a U.S. high-containment biosafety level (BSL)-4 facility for researching zoonotic diseases in large animals, the swine industry is concerned that the animal health portion of this mission will be subordinated to the more publicly supported human health agenda. Our industry needs assurances that USDA will allocate to the laboratory the resources necessary to achieve and enhance its mission to protect U.S. animal industries and exports against catastrophic economic losses caused by foreign animal disease agents. We need assurances that the Plum Island mission of developing vaccines, treatments and diagnostics for foreign animal diseases, as well as training animal health professionals to recognize and diagnose foreign animal diseases, will not be lost in the new NBAF facility.

To illustrate the importance of this decision to the U.S. livestock industry, one has only to look at the cost of a foreign animal disease outbreak. In 2005, it was estimated that a Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak would cost the U.S. pork industry

between \$40 billion and \$60 billion, an estimate that would certainly be higher today. The immediate loss of our pork export markets would cost our industry approximately \$4.1 billion.

In summary, we believe the location of the NBAF must be decided based on assessed risk rather than on which entity is willing to build such a facility. Locations need to be reexamined based on a risk profile to see if the “island effect” can be recreated by siting the facility in an area with low densities of livestock and wildlife. We also need the new facility to enhance the capabilities of our industry with regard to research, diagnostics and treatment for all foreign animal diseases.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the views of the U.S. swine industry and the National Pork Producers Council on this critical decision affecting all of U.S. animal agriculture.