

Testimony

on behalf of the

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

with regard to

The Proposed Construction of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility

submitted to the

United States House of Representatives - Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

The Honorable Bart Stupak, Chairman

submitted by

Mr. Gary Voogt

President-Elect

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

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Washington, D.C.



**National Cattlemen's
Beef Association**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my name is Gary Voogt and I am a cattle producer from Marne, Michigan, and the President-elect of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). On behalf of the more than 247,000 members represented by NCBA, and our state and breed affiliates, I appreciate the opportunity to give you my views on the proposed National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). As you know, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have been discussing the need for a state-of-the-art foreign animal disease research center for several years. The U.S. livestock industry has also advocated for improvements since this is the only facility in the U.S. that can conduct the appropriate and vital foreign animal disease research. NBAF will replace the research and foreign animal disease diagnostic facility currently at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center in New York. NCBA has been actively involved with the committees of jurisdiction and with the Administration to offer input and feedback on this new facility.

The introduction of foreign animal diseases, either accidental or intentional, is a huge threat to the U.S. cattle industry. One such threat is foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), the most contagious animal disease known, and it represents a worst-case scenario for cattle producers because of the variety of the species involved (cattle, sheep, swine, and wildlife such as deer), the rapid spread of the disease, and the difficulty in controlling outbreaks.

An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United States could devastate the cattle industry. Foot-and-mouth is a viral disease that is spread via contact and fomites, with

inhalation and ingestion being the routes of infection. Airborne transmission (virus can be spread by the wind and is influenced by weather conditions) has been reported, and cattle may be more susceptible to this route of infection.

It is estimated that a domestic outbreak would result in losses of \$10 to \$34 billion. This figure is a result of production losses, export losses, control costs (de-population, disposal, vaccination, disinfection, surveillance), and allied industry losses (feed suppliers, banks, veterinarians, equipment dealers). The 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom cost \$6 billion and resulted in almost 6.5 million animals being destroyed. Many of our members could immediately be put out of business, and the beef industry, which we have worked so hard to develop, could be crippled. As you can see, the need for diagnostic activities, prevention and treatment research, and the development of effective counter-measures are critical to the health and welfare of the domestic cattle herd and cattle producers across this country.

NCBA has more than 100 years of experience working closely with local, state, and Federal animal health officials, veterinarians, and animal scientists to control and eradicate animal diseases, and to prevent the introduction of foreign animal diseases into the United States. With the help of facilities such as Plum Island, we have created a series of formidable barriers to the introduction of foreign animal diseases, and we have been successful at eradicating many diseases that were at one time present in our domestic herd. It is because of this work that the United States has been free from foot-and-mouth disease for more than 70 years.

However, Plum Island is an old facility whose infrastructure has not kept up with today's technology, nor does it meet the demands of today's research needs. Technology has markedly improved over that available when the animal buildings were constructed more than 50 years ago. Throughout the years, funding has not been timely or adequate enough to constantly improve the Plum Island facilities.

In addition, Plum Island is not the "fortress" some people may contend. The island has long had a problem with wildlife swimming over from the mainland at low tide, and there have been numerous reports of how close boaters can get to the island without any warning or consequences. Regardless of its location, new and modern technology must be utilized to protect our food animal herd.

It is critical that the United States have an adequate large animal biosecurity level 3 and 4 (BSL-3/BSL-4) laboratory to conduct research on all of the diseases that could destroy or sicken the food animal population. We believe that modern biocontainment technology is adequate to protect our industry and to allow for safe research and diagnostics on the mainland, or wherever the NBAF facility is located.

The multiple layers of protection found in today's BSL- 3 and BSL-4 labs will protect from releases as long as the Administration and Congress commit to appropriate funding of the facility to make sure it is continuously and properly maintained and upgraded. Even more important is that USDA and DHS require strict adherence to the protocols of

biosecurity that such facilities need to deter accidental or intentional releases. In fact, the precedent for locating BSL-3/BSL-4 laboratories in populated urban centers has been set with such facilities as Canada's National Center for Foreign Animal Disease in Winnipeg. There have been no accidental releases at this facility, which is a testament that the population can be protected.

Because of the incredible impact this disease, and other foreign animal diseases, could have on the U.S. cattle industry, NCBA has long taken proactive measures to work with industry and government to address the response to an outbreak. NCBA has sponsored summits and has participated in training exercises to work with first responders, government officials, and others in the cattle and livestock industries to identify what does and does not work, and to try to find ways to improve the response.

Additionally, both USDA and NCBA have worked with foreign governments and industries, including those in Canada and Mexico, in response planning. Prevention is the primary goal, but we have been, and will continue to be, aggressive in our work with all of our partners to be ready with early detection, rapid response, and recovery in case of an incursion of any cattle disease, including foot-and-mouth disease. We understand that although the Federal government is a partner in combating foreign animal diseases, we cannot afford to sit back and rely solely on them to protect our industry.

Foreign animal diseases have to be taken seriously as a threat to the U.S. food supply and the welfare of our country's cattle producers, and we thank you for giving thorough and

careful consideration to this issue. NCBA supports coordination and collaboration, where appropriate, amongst the Departments to enhance each of their abilities to achieve the goals under their respective mission areas, as well as to avoid duplication of efforts which waste taxpayer dollars. However, we remain concerned that DHS does not understand agriculture and has an inherent tendency to want to extend their role beyond their mission area. It is imperative that the needs of the agriculture community not be lost within the larger focus of DHS. USDA has long had the expertise on studying animal diseases, and they must be given the ability to continue in that role. They must also have the ability to study all foreign animal diseases, and not just foot and mouth disease.

As you can see, our industry has given much thought to the closing of Plum Island and the construction of NBAF. NCBA supports the construction of NBAF because this new facility will give USDA and DHS better tools to study and protect against foreign animal diseases. We have not, and will not, take a position on where this facility should be built, and our support is contingent upon the ability of USDA to retain their mission of conducting research on all foreign animal diseases. It is also contingent upon seeing a commitment from Congress and the Administration to ensure this facility is properly funded and maintained. We cannot afford for this facility to be run down like Plum Island has been.

I appreciate your listening to cattle producers' concerns regarding this facility, and I hope that you will continue to work with our industry on this issue. I also hope that you will

work with the other committees of jurisdiction, the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Homeland Security, in order to ensure that USDA has the ability to carry out its own responsibilities at the new facility without the mission creep we have seen from DHS. The vital work that has been done at Plum Island over the past 50 years must not be diluted or lost in the broader direction of DHS.

Major Points

- Foreign Animal Disease Research is critical to protecting the U.S. cattle industry
- Plum Island is an old facility that has not been adequately maintained
- NCBA supports the construction of a state-of-the-art animal disease research facility to replace Plum Island
- NCBA does not have a position on where the new facility is located
- USDA's role in research has to be preserved, and the focus of the research needs to be on all foreign animals diseases, not just foot-and-mouth disease
- DHS should not be involved in animal disease research. Their job is to work with USDA to develop effective counter-measures
- Congress and the Administration must make a commitment to fund this new facility to ensure it remains state-of-the-art, and not be allowed to end up like Plum Island

GARY VOOGT
NCBA Officer – President Elect



Gary and his wife Shirley own and operate a registered Angus family farm in West Michigan. The farm participates in bull test stations in Michigan and Indiana in addition to operating a test station at the farm.

Gary is a graduate of Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan with a B.S. degree in Civil Engineering. He is a registered Professional Engineer. In July, 2007 he retired from a 41 year career as owner and CEO of a consulting engineering company. He also served on the school and church boards and held public office as Township Treasurer.

Voogt is a past president of the Michigan Cattlemen's Association where he has been a member for 35 years, and past chairman of the Michigan Beef Industry Commission and a director for 18 years. He received a Distinguished Service Award from Michigan State University, and he with his family have been selected as both Member of the Year and Purebred Breeder of the Year by the Michigan Cattlemen's Association.

Voogt has represented Michigan since 1989 as a director at NCBA. He was elected Region I Vice President of NCBA in 2003 and serves on the Executive Committee. In 2007 he served as Chairman of the Federation of State Beef Councils division of NCBA. Other NCBA service includes the Nominating Committee, the Evaluation Committee, the Beef Checkoff Working Group, Vice Chairman Beef Promotion Operating Committee, Vice Chairman of Global Marketing Group, and Director of the U.S. Meat Export Federation.