

**Statement of USDA Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Greg Ibach
Before the United States House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture
May 21, 2019**

Chairman Costa, Ranking Member Rouzer and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be before you today to discuss pressing animal health issues and provide an update on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to address them. Secretary Sonny Perdue has charged all of us at USDA to "do right and feed everyone." It is a mission that I, in my role as Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP), take to heart every day. At MRP we strive to help our farmers and ranchers produce high-quality plants, animals, and related products that are in demand all around the world, and to protect and preserve export markets to facilitate the clean, safe trade of those goods.

Central to those efforts is our ability to keep harmful foreign plant and animal pests and diseases out of the country. One of the two agencies I oversee, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) leads those important actions. Given today's hearing topic, my testimony will focus on APHIS' animal health function. Using its authority under the *Animal Health Protection Act*, the agency has created a comprehensive system of overlapping safeguards that protects U.S. agriculture from foreign animal pests and diseases.

APHIS, using the best available scientific research, identifies pests and diseases of concern around the globe and implements necessary mitigations to reduce risk prior to entry of animals or animal products into the United States. Upon entry, animals and animal products are subject to inspection to ensure that importers are meeting our rigorous animal health import requirements. APHIS trains specialists at its partner agency—U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—to identify and detect potentially problematic imports. Beyond import inspections, CBP also employs airport passenger inspection programs, which include the highly successful detector dog program, to help identify and intercept illegally imported meats and other products that may harbor disease.

Should pests or disease make it into the country, APHIS' surveillance and detection programs allow us to identify them and immediately initiate a targeted response program to swiftly eradicate the pest or disease.

The importance of these programs has been evident in recent years. The 2014-2015 outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in the Midwest was our nation's largest ever animal health disease outbreak. The impacts to individual producers and taxpayers were significant, but ultimately, USDA and our state and industry partners were able to marshal all available resources to successfully combat the devastating disease. Our efforts eventually proved effective, but there were many lessons learned along the way—chief among them, the importance of proper biosecurity. While our priority is always prevention, when an outbreak does occur we can all work together to limit its spread and to reduce the size of the impact.

In a more recent example of a highly successful response effort, USDA was able to eradicate an outbreak of New World screwworm from the Florida Keys in 2017. As soon as the livestock

pest was identified—the first identification in fifty years—USDA and its partners sprang into action. Working with state and local partners, we began active surveillance in the region to identify the pest’s location and conducted inspections of animals and pets in the area and those passing through. To eradicate the pest, we used sterile insect technology, releasing over 150 million sterile flies that killed off the small population in a matter of months. Our swift efforts limited the spread and effects of this devastating pest while minimizing trade implications.

USDA is also in the midst of addressing an ongoing outbreak of virulent Newcastle Disease (vND) in Southern California. Until the outbreak began last May, we had not seen this disease in 15 years. Using his emergency authority under the *Animal Health Protection Act*, Secretary Perdue made available \$45 million in emergency funding to enhance our ability to fight this disease, which is mostly affecting backyard poultry. We are working closely with our state partners to enhance surveillance and detection activities and to ensure euthanasia of potentially exposed birds. This funding has also allowed us to work closely with commercial properties to strengthen biosecurity and to increase outreach to backyard producers to help slow the spread of the disease. APHIS has done a lot of work in recent years to promote regionalization with our foreign trading partners, and thankfully, that work seems to have paid off. Trade disruptions have been minimal with most of our trading partners limiting export restrictions to the county or regional level. Other than those directly affected by the outbreak, most poultry producers have seen little impact from this disease, thanks to our efforts.

African Swine Fever

Our overarching prevention strategies and lessons-learned from these and related response activities have informed USDA’s efforts to address the growing threat of African Swine Fever (ASF). We have effectively protected against ASF thus far, but its continuing spread throughout Asia is of great concern. ASF is a highly contagious and deadly virus that affects domestic and wild pigs. However, it is important to note that this disease does not pose a risk to human health, and it is not a food safety concern.

Nevertheless, should the disease ever enter our country, the effects on individual producers, the thousands of businesses that support the swine industry in their local communities, and the economy at large, would be severe. There is currently no ASF vaccine, leaving depopulation of infected and potentially infected animals as the only viable method of eradication. A positive detection could have major implications on trade—likely resulting in the immediate shutdown of vital export markets. While we have worked hard to promote regionalization and would push our trading partners to limit trade restrictions, it would take time to fully restore these markets.

Despite these concerns, I want to provide some assurances. Even before the recent ASF detection in China, USDA was closely monitoring outbreaks of the disease throughout Europe and determining necessary actions to keep this devastating disease out of the country. We have a number of longstanding tools and processes in place that we continue to evaluate and enhance.

First in our line of defense are our import restrictions. We currently do not allow pork and pork products into the country from China, and we have not in many years, due to the presence of

other diseases such as classical swine fever and foot-and-mouth disease. We have kept these diseases out with the tools we have in place, and we believe we can do the same with ASF.

Second are enhanced inspections and travel notifications. We worked with CBP to ensure their focused attention on commodities and passengers coming from high risk areas. CBP looks closely at cargo coming into the country from these areas to ensure no illegally sourced meat products are coming in. Additionally, passengers CBP deems at highest risk are subject to secondary agricultural inspections to ensure they are not carrying meat or meat products that could harbor the virus, or that other possible risks—such as on-farm visitation—are mitigated.

Through its National Detector Dog Training Center in Georgia, APHIS is training 60 additional beagle teams, up to a total of 179, for CBP's use during inspections to detect and identify agricultural commodities that may harbor pests and diseases, including ASF. These dogs are being deployed at airports and facilities around the country. We have also worked to notify international travelers—through voice announcements and signage at ports of entry—of the potential danger of bringing in seemingly harmless food items that may harbor and spread dangerous pests and diseases like ASF.

Additionally, APHIS, through its Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC) program works to identify and close down high-risk pathways for smuggled goods and products. This includes efforts to track down meat and meat products smuggled into the country and illegally sold at ethnic markets, and to take enforcement action against those involved in those illegal activities.

Third, we have ramped up our ability to rapidly diagnose this disease. We have greatly expanded the number of facilities affiliated with our National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) that can detect ASF. We now have 44 laboratories and 170 laboratory personnel approved to test for this disease allowing us the ability to review over 38,000 samples a day and providing the surge capacity to quickly diagnosis and swiftly eradicate the virus should it enter the country.

We have also worked closely with a variety of stakeholders to raise awareness of ASF. We have engaged producer groups regarding the importance of biosecurity and on-farm protocols to prevent the disease and mitigate farm-to-farm transmissions. Additionally, we have worked to ensure producers and veterinarians alike are familiar with ASF symptoms and are aware of the proper response actions should they suspect infection.

We continue to work closely with our counterparts in Canada and Mexico to strengthen and coordinate prevention and preparedness measures across North America. A few weeks ago, I attended the ASF Forum, an international event hosted by Canada that included animal health officials and agricultural leaders from around the world. We discussed common concerns about ASF and the ways we all need to work together to limit the disease's spread while still maintaining trade. We are committed to continuing these important discussions and keeping you and our industry partners apprised of their progress.

Finally, we have held and will continue to hold ASF response exercises with States, and we have reviewed and updated our ASF response plans to ensure our strategies for responding to ASF—which are similar to how we would respond to many other foreign animal diseases—are up-to-date and understood by everyone who would have a role in carrying them out.

The Farm Bill and Animal Health

While we have a robust set of tools to address ASF and other foreign animal pests and diseases under our existing authorities, I was pleased to see and greatly appreciate the new tools Congress gave us as part of the 2018 Farm Bill.

In addition to the increased support for the existing NAHLN, the bill created two new programs: the National Animal Vaccine Bank and the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program (NADPRP). NADPRP will help us keep foreign pests and diseases out of the country. The enhancements to NAHLN will allow us to detect and diagnose disease to improve our response capabilities. The vaccine bank will help us recover from certain animal health diseases. Together, these three programs will work together, building off our existing authorities and tools, which enhances our ability to protect, preserve, and even expand, foreign trading markets for the high-quality animals and animal products our farmers and ranchers produce.

The vaccine bank, which is to be primarily focused on a vaccine for foot-and-mouth (FMD) disease, will be an effective insurance policy should that disease strike. FMD vaccine would provide an additional tool to limit the spread of the disease and allow for a more rapid road to recovery on a path that reopens export markets.

However, the vaccine bank will only be useful should the disease enter the country. Thankfully, as with ASF, we have proven steps in place to keep it out in the first place, and the NAHLN and the NADPRP program will go a long way to helping us identify and close any gaps in our animal disease prevention programs for FMD and other foreign animal diseases. As we envision the NADPRP program, states, universities, industry and other groups would suggest targeted projects and research that would advance our animal health mission. After an evaluation process, we would fund the most promising of those projects, relying on our partners to carry them out, thereby expanding our ability and knowledge with their expertise. We have had great successes with a similar plant health program, and I am confident that these new projects will prove equally as effective.

We recently held a listening session with stakeholders on these programs and were encouraged to hear tremendous support for each of them. Like you, we want them up and running as quickly as possible and are in the process of evaluating all possible implementation options. But as you know, the Farm Bill entrusted the Secretary with significant discretion as to how to carry out these programs, and we want to ensure we make the right decisions to set these programs up for long-term success. We certainly appreciate the flexibility provided by the Farm Bill and its no-year funding, and also your patience as we work through this important process.

Conclusion

Whether it's our focus on addressing the growing threat of ASF, or implementing the Farm Bill, USDA and our dedicated employees remain committed to supporting our farmers and ranchers by keeping foreign animal pests and diseases at bay. We have, and continue to build upon, a robust set of tools and strategies for preventing and combatting ASF and other potential threats. These and similar efforts have proven effective for years. With your continued support—and that of our State, industry, and global partners—I am confident they will prove successful for years to come.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the members of the Subcommittee may have.