



Biosecurity

March 2008

Plant Biosecurity

One of the principal responsibilities of government is to promote and ensure the availability of safe and secure food, fiber, feed, and natural resources. US agriculture is highly productive and provides the safest and most secure food supply in the world due to the scientific advances that resulted from past investments in agricultural research. Recently, there has been an increased awareness of the need to protect our crops and forest systems from intentional tampering as well as from naturally occurring new and emerging pathogens. As a result of this awareness, various governmental initiatives have enhanced the operations and responsiveness of our plant diagnostic systems, increased the effectiveness of many regulatory processes, and initiated specific planning for recovery from plant diseases. These commendable efforts must continue, with strong focus on addressing remaining gaps and needs, to ensure that the next generations of U.S. citizens have an ample supply of high quality foods, feed, fiber, bioenergy, and feedstocks for industrial products.

▶ Continuing Gaps and Needs:

- **Research:** A continued need for research in microbial genomics, biology, and epidemiology of high-threat pathogens and synthetic agents, diagnostics, forensic technologies, disease management strategies.
- **Resources:** Biosecurity-related resources in great need of financial support include culture collections, pathogen and expert databases, and funding to ensure the availability of secure facilities. Validation of new diagnostic/detection tests requires personnel and funding.
- **Education:** Plant pathologists trained in the field-oriented aspects of our discipline are essential to plant protection efforts and training in the coming years, in contrast to the recent trend in many universities to train students primarily in basic research. First detector training must be continued.
- **Regulatory:** Evaluate the potential of identification of risk group classification for plant pathogens analogous to those of animal and human pathogens.
- **Communication and Coordination:** There is a continuing need for greater communication and coordination among (and within) agencies, industry, academia, scientific societies, and other stakeholders.

Currently, many critical plant biodefense functions are the responsibility of various Federal, State and non-governmental agencies, centers, and programs. While the effectiveness of these entities has been enhanced significantly in recent years by numerous new policies and initiatives, there remains a need for strong, central, overarching plant biosecurity leadership at the USDA. The APS strongly supports adding a Plant Biosecurity Policy Coordinator to the USDA Homeland Security Staff.

▶ **Specific Requests:** The APS encourages Congress to provide the following appropriations for FY 2009 USDA plant biosecurity programs:

- \$14 million for the CSREES National Plant Diagnostic Network, as proposed in the Administration's budget request;
- \$2 million for the National Plant Disease Recovery System as proposed in the President's budget request;
- \$2 million for the Higher Education Agrosecurity Program as proposed in the FY2009 budget request;
- \$3 million for the Homeland Security Staff (HSS) of which not less than \$300,000 in appropriations for two new positions at HSS for a Plant Biosecurity Policy Coordinator and a Food Defense Biosecurity Policy Coordinator.

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