

*The American Phytopathological Society, the American Society of Agronomy,
the Crop Science Society of America, The Entomological Society of America,
the Society of Nematologists, The Soil Science Society of America,
and the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology*

A Proposal for a National Center for Plant Biosecurity

March 2006

We propose the establishment of a **National Center for Plant Biosecurity** (NCPB) within the USDA as a Federal coordinating office staffed by Federal employees and administered at the level of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture. The NCPB will provide a focal point for the enhancement, and coordination of current efforts relating to defense against bioterrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies, such as the recent introduction of soybean rust into the U.S. The NCPB also will provide a strong framework and leadership for anticipating, detecting, responding to, managing, and recovering from such events, as mandated in presidential directive HSPD-9, and will complement and strengthen the **National Plant Disease Recovery System that is called for in HSPD-9**.

Many of the critical functions of a plant biodefense system are currently the responsibility of various Federal, State and non-governmental agencies, centers, and programs. The Federal NCPB will not duplicate those efforts, but rather it will build on and coordinate these existing resources and capabilities to provide a state-of-the-art national infrastructure for documenting, monitoring, and protecting U.S. agriculture against the threat of new or emerging plant diseases and pests. The NCPB will function as a visionary, strategic planning, and coordinating entity and will be linked directly to USDA agencies and staff responsible for plant biosecurity and will be linked closely to DHS and other agency offices responsible for biosecurity. The roles of the NCPB will be applicable as well to naturally-occurring plant-related events, such as the recent introduction into the southern United States of soybean rust, an agent then listed on the USDA-APHIS threat list. Among other things, the NCPB will:

- Provide overarching coordination of all plant biosecurity activities by all Federal agencies;
- Provide a single point of contact with the Federal government on matters affecting plant biosecurity;
- Provide leadership during specific breaches of biosecurity or major disasters related to plants and help clarify which Federal agency has jurisdiction over different aspects of such events;
- Foster communication and synergies among government, private, and professional entities;
- Identify resource needs for surge capacity in reacting to suspected or actual events;
- Ensure that the goals and objectives of the various plant biosecurity programs are implemented by the agency charged with programmatic responsibility;
- Build on, support, and enhance existing and newly developed facilities and capabilities for detection, diagnosis, and communication with respect to incidents or threats to plant security;
- Collaborate with other agencies and organizations to conduct frequent vulnerability assessments;
- Develop strategic plans for addressing vulnerabilities identified in such assessments and long-term strategic plans for enhancing and expanding activities for effective mitigation of threats from biological agents;;
- Act in concert with existing agencies charged with the protection of critical nodes of agricultural commodity production and processing and other entities to develop and regularly review response and recovery plans;
- Ensure the development of educational and training programs and materials for potential “first detectors” and “first responders;” and
- Identify and support targeted research initiatives that enhance the country’s ability to prevent, detect, respond to, and recover from the introduction of a threat agent, including the identification and prioritization of needed research on threatening plant diseases and pests.