

Proposal for the National Center for Plant Biosecurity

Frequently Asked Questions

April 2005

What is the mission of the National Center for Plant Biosecurity (NCPB)?

The NCPB will build on and enhance current efforts in biosecurity by providing the strategic planning, long-range vision, agency coordination, and prioritization of needs and resources to ensure a state-of-the-art national infrastructure for documenting, monitoring, and protecting U.S. agriculture against new or emerging plant diseases and pests. The NCPB's contributions will support our Nation's agricultural enterprise regardless of whether the threat is the result of bioterrorism or one of the naturally occurring, emerging, or reemerging plant diseases or pests to which producers, foresters, scientists, and educators must respond, such as the recent introductions of the agents of karnal bunt, plum pox, sudden oak death, citrus canker and soybean rust. Should an introduction occur in spite of prevention activities, the NCPB would provide a central focus for rapid, effective, and safe response, as mentioned in paragraph (18)(b) of **Homeland Security Presidential Directive #9 (HSPD-9)** that requires the Secretary of Agriculture, working with other agencies, to develop a **National Plant Disease Recovery System**.

Why do we need yet another center related to agrosecurity?

While there are many quasi-governmental, private, and university centers focused on various aspects of agriculturally related biosecurity, there is not one, central Federal center, staffed with Federal employees, that overlooks the entire spectrum, is responsible for and coordinates all public and private efforts related to plant biosecurity. The current USDA Office of Homeland Security attempts to accomplish some of the proposed activities of the new NCPB; however, the existing office lacks the authority and jurisdiction necessary to be a true nexus for all plant related biosecurity issues.

What are the primary goals and objectives of the NCPB?

- Serve as an overarching entity with responsibility for coordination of all plant biosecurity activities by all Federal agencies;
- Provide leadership during specific breaches of biosecurity related to plants;
- Provide a focal point to help communicate which Federal agency has jurisdiction over different aspects of an event and thereby minimize redundancy of effort;
- Identify resources to address needs for surge capacity in reacting to suspected events;
- Foster communication and synergies between and among governmental, public, private, and professional entities;
- Ensure that the goals and objectives of the various plant biosecurity programs are implemented by the agency (or agencies) charged with programmatic responsibility;
- Provide a "one-stop shop" for initial contact with the Federal government on matters related to plant bioterrorism.

These NCPB activities will be developed and administered in a manner consistent with, and supportive of, the responsibilities set out in HSPD-9.

Why is the NCPB necessary when there are numerous existing agencies and entities charged with various biosecurity responsibilities?

The need for a long-range vision for plant security and for strategic planning across agencies and disciplines is well-established, but currently much of the work of agency personnel is directed to the management of often unpredictable outbreaks and immediate crises. The proposed center would fill the need for strategic planning that interfaces with many agencies and would assure greater communication and interaction so that the Nation's needs are met in the most effective and efficient manner. Also needed are effective means by which to assess the contributions of each organization toward the overall goals and to assess the sufficiency of resources needed to maintain a highly effective, all-encompassing plant biosecurity program.

Will the NCPB compete with other, existing or planned centers related to national security such as the NBACC (DHS), the NIAB (NASULGC), etc.?

Many agencies and entities within the U.S. government, State and local governments, the private sector, universities, and other groups already are engaged actively in protecting U.S. plant resources from intentional or unintentional introductions of pathogens and pests. Key among them are the various agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (especially the Agricultural Research Service [ARS], the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service [APHIS], and the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service [CSREES]), and within the Department of Homeland Security (particularly the Research and Technology Directorate and the Immigration and Borders Directorate). The National Institute for Agricultural Biosecurity (NIAS), a coalition of land grant universities, is addressing the roles of these institutions in our nation's security system. The NCPB will not duplicate these efforts, but rather it will be linked closely with each of these entities and serve as a visionary, strategic planning, and coordinating body, the overarching Federal component of the family of critical agencies and entities providing information to and receiving guidance from the Secretary of Agriculture as she or he fulfills the responsibilities of this Sector-Specific Agency. The NCPB will be the ultimate coordinating and communication nexus for these efforts, a nexus for the Nation's plant resource protection and a one-stop shop for contact and information on this subject. The NCPB also will ensure that the Nation's plant biosecurity efforts are applied effectively to the enhancement of U.S. agricultural systems during natural or accidental disease or pest outbreaks.

How and by whom will the NCPB be administered?

The NCPB will be a Federal entity, established in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and administered from the office of the Secretary of Agriculture.

Where will the NCPB be physically located, and will it require new and/or dedicated facilities?

The location and physical structure of the NCPB have not yet been determined, but a location convenient to activities in our Nation's capitol, the multi-agency, national biosecurity campus at Ft. Detrick, MD, and USDA programs at Beltsville/Riverdale, MD may be desirable.

How many people would staff the NCPB and what would they do?

The staff of the NCPB would likely start as a small core group of Federal employees consisting of three types of individuals. A group of highly regarded scientists having experience with crop security research and knowledge of biosecurity-related issues would provide expertise and informed input on NCPB issues and scientific priorities. A small number of administrators would develop and foster the essential communication, coordination and linkages between and among the agencies and entities responsible for National plant security. An appropriate number of office staff would support both the scientists and administrators.

How would the NCPB have helped during the recent discovery of soybean rust in the U.S.?

As the principal Federal entity responsible for coordinating all plant biosecurity activities, the NCPB would have been required to have an approved response and recovery plan in place prior to the discovery of soybean rust. The plan would have established the protocols for all entities. For example, it would have determined how the NCPB would work with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to confirm the discovery. The NCPB would have been the lead entity to work with law enforcement officials to ensure that the introduction was not an act of bioterrorism. The NCPB would be responsible for ensuring that an effective recovery plan was in place to address immediately any outbreaks as well as to ensure the availability of sustained multiple-year funding for needed response infrastructure, such as regional sentinel plot monitoring. And, perhaps, more importantly, the NCPB would have been responsible for developing the long-term strategic research needs for developing soybeans resistant to rust.