



The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report 2003-101

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Committee on Agriculture and Consumer Services

Senator James E. "Jim" King, Jr., President

REVIEW THE COORDINATION OF STATE AND FEDERAL AUTHORITIES WHO PERFORM INSPECTIONS AT FLORIDA'S SEAPORTS AND AIRPORTS WITH AGRICULTURAL INSPECTORS IN AN EFFORT TO MAXIMIZE EXCLUSION OF AGRICULTURAL PESTS AND DISEASES

SUMMARY

Florida is an important agricultural state, supplying more than half the nation's fresh fruits and vegetables in the winter months. It is surpassed only by tourism in economic importance to the state and its impact on the Florida economy is estimated at more than \$50 billion annually. Animal agriculture is also important in Florida with livestock, dairy, poultry and aquaculture accounting for \$1.7 billion in production. Unfortunately, Florida's favorable climate, location, 25 ports of entry, international trade, cultural habits, agricultural smugglers, and tourism make it a high-risk sentinel area for exotic pest and disease introduction and establishment. In managing repeated pest and disease outbreaks, Florida has incurred an enormous financial burden. Since 1997, Florida and the federal government have spent nearly \$400 million to combat invasive species that threaten crops.

Following September 11, immediate steps were taken by state and federal governments to secure sensitive facilities and to examine vulnerabilities to agriculture and our food supply. The United States Congress passed legislation to create the Department of Homeland Security. President Bush has made clear the important role of agriculture and protecting the food supply by including parts of the USDA in that plan. The Florida Department of Agriculture has recently created the position of Director of Bio and Food Security Preparedness. Commissioner Charles Bronson made the appointment to coordinate the department's numerous programs focusing on homeland security and to have a point of contact with federal programs in the area of homeland security.

Since Florida is such a high-risk area, it is of significant importance to be operational and ready to predict pathways and detect and respond to new pest introductions in an effective and efficient manner. With

new pest and disease introduction pressures on the rise, the resources necessary to address exclusion, detection, and response programs have been over extended. Several components are needed and have been requested by the department to improve their overall response to new pest and disease detections.

The Department of Homeland Security will be fully operational by September 2003, but it will be just one of many players with important roles and responsibilities for ensuring homeland security. This report provides an explanation of several initiatives that the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is requesting funds for in order to have the ability to respond appropriately and continue to be considered an effective part of this developing network.

BACKGROUND

In 2001, the Committee on Agriculture and Consumer Services was assigned Interim Project 2002-103 entitled, "Review of Programs Pertaining to the Interception and Eradication of Agricultural Pests and Diseases in the State." Recommendations were made for long-term resources (financial, personnel, methodology, authority) to maintain effective surveillance and response capabilities for exclusion and emergency outbreaks of invasive animal and plant pests and diseases. In response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the states were provided with additional federal funds to address the impact of the attacks and to improve preparedness. The department has worked to enhance Florida's homeland security efforts and to strengthen border protection points against illegal introduction of animal and plant pest and diseases. This interim project further explores unified approaches that the department can use to more effectively work together to strengthen the process by which critical information can be shared, analyzed, integrated and

disseminated to help prevent or minimize infestations. This report also provides information concerning Florida's deficiencies within existing exclusion, detection, and response programs, and the funding needed for improvements.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with staff of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the United States Department of Agriculture in order to obtain information relating to state and federal exclusion, detection and eradication programs. Site visits were made to the I-10 Agricultural Interdiction Station at Suwannee River and the Yulee Agricultural Interdiction Station to observe the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service's Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement, Bureau of Uniformed Services inspect highway shipments of agricultural, horticultural, aquacultural and livestock commodities. A visit was also made to the Jacksonville Sea Port Authority to observe a truck-mounted gamma ray imaging system that enables investigators to quickly look inside trucks entering Florida.

FINDINGS

Florida is an important agricultural state, supplying more than half the nation's fresh fruits and vegetables in the winter months. It is surpassed only by tourism in economic importance to the state and its impact on the Florida economy is estimated at more than \$50 billion annually. Animal agriculture is also important in Florida with livestock, dairy, poultry and aquaculture accounting for \$1.7 billion in production.

Unfortunately, Florida's favorable climate, location, 25 ports of entry, international trade, cultural habits, agricultural smugglers, and tourism make it a high-risk sentinel area for exotic pest and disease introduction and establishment. These invasive pest species can quickly reach damaging levels in a new environment because the natural predators and parasites that keep them in ecological balance in their native lands are not normally present in this state. Consequently, an exotic species can cause significant damage in this country even though it may not be a problem in its county of origin. The invasive species not only can be damaging to the crops but they can represent a threat to human and animal health.

Humans are the primary means of introduction of exotic pests and diseases through intentional and

unintentional acts. There are three primary routes of entry. Some are intentionally brought into the state for specific purpose and are allowed to escape or spread in an unexpected manner. Other pests enter the state in or on host plants, or they arrive on shipping and packing material.

Pests and diseases can also be brought into the state in the dirt and soil that cover the body and tires of cars, transportation vehicles or farm equipment. They must be washed down in a special area before leaving the ports. Garbage brought in from other countries on airplanes and boats, cruise ships and other ships are required to dispose of all garbage in special containers, but in smaller ports, separate disposal sites may not exist or may be ignored. Ballast water from ships is a primary source for the introduction of aquatic nuisance species. In 1991, ballast water introduced cholera into the shellfish beds at the bay in Mobile, Alabama. Other documented introductions include: yellow fever into Alaska, zebra mussel, spiny water flea and European ruff into the Great Lakes, and Asian clam into Los Angeles and Long Beach.

In managing repeated pest and disease outbreaks, Florida has incurred an enormous financial burden. Since 1997, Florida and the federal government have spent nearly \$400 million to combat invasive species that threaten crops.

The United States Congress passed legislation to create the Department of Homeland Security. President Bush has made clear the important role of agriculture and protecting the food supply by including parts of the USDA in that plan. The legislation moves the specialized border inspection, quarantine, and enforcement functions of the USDA and the Plum Island Animal Disease Center to the new department to provide the coordinating authorities required to ensure integrated plans to address the threat of agri-terrorism. This move affirms the critical role played by inspections of agricultural cargo, passengers and trade in food and agricultural products and acknowledges the close partnerships USDA inspection personnel have developed with the U.S. Customs Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Border Patrol.

The Department of Homeland Security will be fully operational by September 2003, so it is not known at this time how state and local homeland security

functions will be implemented to lead to more efficient, effective and coordinated programs with better information sharing and a more robust protection of the country's people, borders and critical infrastructure. The new Department of Homeland Security will be just one of many players with important roles and responsibilities for ensuring homeland security.

Following September 11, immediate steps were taken by state and federal governments to secure sensitive facilities and to examine vulnerabilities to agriculture and our food supply. United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman indicated that the USDA is now concerned with intentional as well as unintentional threats and has taken steps to secure sensitive facilities and has examined its vast array of programs and how to more efficiently communicate to meet pressing security needs. Over \$35 million has been used to strengthen the Agricultural Quarantine Inspection program which is the first line of defense to exclude agricultural pests and diseases at borders. These funds are being used to expedite development of an automated system of inspections in coordination with the U.S. Customs Service to better identify cargo. An additional \$1.5 million is being used to hire additional inspectors for imported meat and poultry and \$15.3 million has been allocated to improve rapid detection technologies for foot and mouth diseases as well as other animal diseases.

The USDA has indicated that a turf war exists between USDA inspectors and U.S. Customs inspectors. U.S. Customs inspectors strive to get people through the inspection lines as quickly as possible and sometimes push away USDA inspectors in order to prevent long lines. As the Department of Homeland Security becomes functional, this is one process that will need to be addressed.

The federal government needs assistance from its cooperators at the state and local levels to adequately address homeland security threats, so grants and other assistance to states have been provided to assist in strengthening partnerships and the coordination of activities in the following areas:

- Improved surveillance and early detection and response capabilities, both for animal and plant pest and diseases;
- Enhanced infrastructures for rapid detection and diagnosis of animal and plant disease and pest threats;

- Additional capability throughout the nation so that disease symptoms can be quickly detected and correctly diagnosed;
- Increased capacity to dispose of animal carcasses; and
- Increased capacity in each region of the country to safely dispose of animal carcasses in the event of a major disease outbreak.

The USDA has appropriated \$2,231,451 to Florida to bolster food and agricultural homeland security protections. Of that, \$1,650,000 will be used for rapid detection and diagnostics network, \$350,000 will be for plant pest and disease detection, \$162,045, will be for animal disease response, and \$69,407 will be for animal disease surveillance.

The Florida Department of Agriculture has recently created the position of Director of Bio and Food Security Preparedness. Commissioner Charles Bronson made the appointment to coordinate the department's numerous programs focusing on homeland security and to have a point of contact with federal programs in the area of homeland security. DACS has played an increasingly critical role in homeland security. The department has deployed four canine units and is in the process of acquiring four more to help inspect 12 million trucks entering Florida each year. The animal and officer teams will be strategically placed at various of the department's 22 interdiction stations to perform scent searches of food commodities and commercial traffic. The canine teams, coupled with the department's truck mounted gamma ray machines which scan the interior of trucks, should provide a major boost to Florida's homeland security efforts.

OPTIONS

If exclusion at the port of entry fails and an invasive species enters the United States, it is imperative that it be detected as quickly as possible so that an effective and affordable eradication program can be implemented before the pest spreads. The state would benefit greatly from information sharing with the U.S. Customs office on incoming commercial shipments. States need to have access to information about cargo concerning what it is, where it came from and where it is going to aid in detection and rapid response. The consolidation of some homeland security functions makes sense and, as the Department of Homeland Security becomes functional, and Florida's information management systems develop the capability to better

network with other agencies, more can be done to facilitate even greater sharing, analyzing, integrating and disseminating of information.

Since Florida is such a high-risk area, it is of significant importance to be operational and ready to predict pathways and detect and respond to new pest introductions in an effective and efficient manner. With new pest and disease introduction pressures on the rise, the resources necessary to address exclusion, detection, and response programs have been over extended. The use of OPS resources to address new pest and disease detections has been an over utilized resource and is not effective for the development of an effective strike team response. Several components are needed and have been requested by the department to improve the overall response to new pest and disease detections. Below is an explanation of several different but related initiatives including improvements to the fruit fly detection network, expansion of the electronic imaging system to quickly distribute imported agricultural product inspection information before commodities are distributed, development of a database on emerging pest and disease threats and potential pathways, development of innovative eradication and control strategies, and continuing education designed to increase awareness of the importance of protection of our agricultural resources.

Agricultural Interdiction Stations

The Agricultural Interdiction Stations are the first and only line of defense to safeguard Florida's citizens and visitors. This is accomplished through inspection of commodities that include hazardous and dangerous shipments as well as biological threats. The Agricultural Interdiction Stations will inspect over 12 million vehicles this year with a projected 3-5 percent increase in vehicular traffic each and every year. The department is requesting 25 additional FTEs and \$1.3 million in general revenue. These positions will provide an increased margin of safety for the officer and motoring public by moving the vehicles through the stations faster, helping to avoid a back-up of trucks onto the interstates. The long-range impact will be more efficiency in identifying and preventing the introduction of agricultural plant and pest diseases.

Identification of Food Pathogens

The ability to respond quickly is essential in identifying suspect foods for removal and to provide information on what foods are safe for consumption. The

department is requesting 4 FTEs and \$384,536 to develop and conduct complex food analyses in addition to developing new methods of responding to bio-terrorism and other emergencies.

Test for Prohibited Material in Animal Feed

The department was provided with funding in the FY 2002-03 to develop a pilot project to evaluate laboratory tests used to identify prohibited ingredients in animal feeds and is requesting \$50,000 in general revenue to continue the project. The cost for these tests is anticipated to be in the \$100-\$300 per sample range. Testing for these prohibited materials in animal feed will allow the department to be proactive in this arena and reduce the chance of the introduction of Mad Cow Disease in Florida.

The Sterile Mediterranean fruit fly preventative release program (PRP) has been, and continues to be, a very effective means to prevent the introduction of the medfly. This program, which has been in place since 1997, has been a key reason that Florida has remained medfly-free since that time. The PRP blankets high-risk areas of Florida with sterile medflies. If a fertile medfly is introduced into Florida, it mates with a sterile fly and no offspring or infestation results. The department has requested \$3,439,122, which would improve and expand the PRP and establish two new positions to monitor quality and conduct important fly identification work.

Staffing and Equipment for a Bio-Security Laboratory

The department was appropriated \$875,000 in FY 2002-2003 to build a bio-safety facility at the Kissimmee Diagnostic Laboratory. It is requesting 6 FTEs and \$1.6 million in general revenue and \$158,000 from the Contracts and Grants Trust Fund to properly staff and equip the facility in order to efficiently analyze and contain suspect animal diseases, such as anthrax, that could be used as weapons of mass destruction.

Laboratory Safety and Security Control System

The department is requesting \$239,000 in general revenue for a security system and critical safety equipment required by the National Bio-Security Program. This will provide security and accountability at food laboratories where highly toxic pathogens are stored for reference and analysis purposes to allow for

early response to bio-terrorism threats as well as on-going surveillance.

Animal Disease Upgrade Laboratory Information Management System

To assist in the rapid diagnosis of animal and human diseases, the department must upgrade its current software and hardware system to provide critical instrument integration and diagnostic analyses to transfer the data electronically to other regulatory agencies, such as the Center for Disease Control. The Bureau of Diagnostic Laboratories has experienced an increased role in the development of a laboratory network both in the state and nationally. It is critical to develop the capabilities to better network with other agencies. Florida's diagnostic laboratories have been identified as one of eleven key laboratories in a national network of veterinary laboratories and with funding for this initiative, it is unlikely that the department will be able to demonstrate its ability to respond appropriately and continue to be considered as part of this developing network.

Staffing for Northwest Florida Agricultural Interdiction Station

The department is requesting 25 FTEs and \$2.0 million in general revenue to establish an operating budget for the new northwest Agricultural Interdiction Station on Interstate 10 at the Alabama-Florida state line. The construction of this facility was appropriated in the current year and the planning and design of this facility is nearing completion. Although construction has not yet begun, the new positions will continually be patrolling and inspecting trucks along major highways. The officers will shift to the permanent location once the building is completed around September 2003. An interdiction station in this location will greatly enhance the department's ability to conduct law enforcement actions, respond quickly to infected shipments and better protect Florida's agricultural industry. It will also increase the dollars generated from the Bill of Lading Program.

The department is also requesting \$1 million to cover a shortfall in original funding for the construction of the interdiction station to build the approach and exit station ramps. It is essential that each entrance and exit ramp be adequate to meet the demands of a large volume of commercial traffic and in accordance with Florida Department of Transportation standards.

Gamma Ray Inspection Technology

The department is requesting \$2.1 million in general revenue to purchase two additional Mobile Gamma-Ray Imaging Vehicles for the purpose of detecting agricultural violations. These vehicles also detect through radiography/live imagery, internal cargo contents of commercial vehicles and/or shipping containers that travel into and out of Florida. The gamma-ray vehicle will allow detection of humans as well as potentially devastating shipments or implements that could be used in agri-terrorism. The mobility of the vehicles will allow their use at any of the interdiction stations as well as facilitate cooperation between ports of entry which account for increasingly large imports of agricultural products and which continue to pose significant threats to Florida's agricultural industry.

Smuggling Interdiction to Control Pests and Diseases

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) takes the first protective measures to intercept an increasing number of plant pests and infested agricultural products in Florida that could destroy ecosystems and agriculture across America. APHIS has developed cooperative initiatives with other federal and state agencies to enhance pest exclusion efforts. In Florida, the primary APHIS cooperator is DACS. APHIS and DACS have formed the Florida Interdiction and Smuggling Team (FIST), a group of specially trained officers from federal and state regulatory agencies to identify and close smuggling pathways. The FIST is able to determine what types of prohibited agricultural commodities are being smuggled into Florida using market surveys, inspections and blitzes.

In addition to agricultural pest incursions that occur at ports of entry, there is growing concern over smuggled agricultural products that arrive in larger lots overland across the Canadian/US or Mexico/US borders. Interdiction efforts to determine smuggling pathways have turned up a wide variety of prohibited agricultural products. Inspection at ethnic markets, wholesale terminal markets, and agricultural inspection stations have helped close this pathway for prohibited products that are high-risk for agricultural pests and diseases. The department is requesting 4 FTEs and \$288,616 aid in its cooperative state/federal smuggling interdiction effort.