

# UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION - 2004

**RESOLUTION NUMBER:** 34      **APPROVED**

**SOURCE:** COMMITTEE ON IMPORT/EXPORT

**SUBJECT MATTER:** AGRICULTURE AS A PRIORITY OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

**DATES:** OCTOBER 27, 2004

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Congress created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to take the lead on coordinating border security and law enforcement efforts to guard against future terrorist events. During preliminary discussions on the creation of the new department, The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) expressed concerns to the President and Congress regarding the proposed transfer of portions of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to the newly created agency. State departments of agriculture work closely with and rely greatly on USDA-APHIS and its Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI) program to insure that cargo and passengers entering this country through legal access routes are screened for harmful animal pests and diseases. They have also long relied on USDA-APHIS state-federal cooperative programs to provide the resources needed to protect plant and animal health.

Agricultural Quarantine Inspection is now a part of the Customs and Border Protection Directorate of the DHS that serves as the front line of defense at U.S. ports against agricultural products without the required phytosanitary documentation. The new "One Face at the Border" will create Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers (GS-11) with the primary mission of preventing terrorists and their weapons from entering the United States and with a secondary mission of performing traditional inspections of customs, immigration and agriculture. Furthermore, CBP Agriculture Specialists (GS-11) are to be stationed only at ports with large volumes of cargo and only to support the CBP Officers. Legacy agriculture inspectors, who have a minimum of two years formal education in science, may "apply and compete" for the CBP Agriculture Specialists positions.

Documents discovered in Afghanistan have identified food and agriculture as potential targets for terrorist attacks.

## **RESOLUTION:**

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) recognizes that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is charged with the responsibility of protecting the security of our nation's food and agriculture by preventing the entrance of plant and animal pests and diseases.

The USAHA recommends that DHS recognize that prevention of animal and plant diseases through purposeful or accidental introduction of disease agents must be considered a critical priority of the agency.

The USAHA urges the DHS to reconsider the de-emphasis of agriculture inspections at medium and large ports of entry and the elimination of agriculture inspections at small ports of entry.

The USAHA requests that legacy agriculture inspectors, with the proven education, skills and experience in cargo and baggage agriculture inspection, be immediately reassigned as Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Agriculture Specialists and that CBP Officers positions be open to all legacy customs, immigration and agriculture inspectors.

**RESPONSE:**

Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Customs and Boarder Patrol (CBP), recognizes and affirms that the mission of the CBP Agriculture Inspection program is to prevent the introduction of invasive species into the United States. The mission also includes protecting U.S. agricultural resources, maintaining the marketability of agricultural products, and facilitating the movement of people and commodities across the borders.

Inspecting travelers and cargo are vitally important port of entry activities in keeping prohibited items out of the U. S., monitoring for significant agricultural health threats, encouraging compliance with regulations, and educating the public and importers concerning agricultural quarantine regulations. There is no plan to reduce the number of CBP Agriculture Specialists. To the contrary, CBP is aggressively filling vacancies nationwide and expects to be fully staffed by January 2006.

Legacy agriculture inspectors were reassigned as CBP Agriculture Specialists shortly after the formation of CBP. Since the transition CBP has created an outstanding training program for new CBP Agriculture Specialist officers in cooperation with USDA-APHIS-PPQ. Furthermore, the plan includes training our current force of 18,000 CBP Officers in basic agricultural border inspection functions to identify potential harmful introductions into our agricultural economy. Clearly a force multiplier effect will be realized from this infusion of additional assets in this aspect of the mission.