

IS WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE VULNERABLE TO TERRORISM?

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If one were to pose the question: “Is Wisconsin agriculture vulnerable to terrorism?” what do you think the response would be?

Before we answer that question, it is necessary to define terrorism. These definitions are taken from Rocco Casagrande, Ph.D., Director, Homeland Security Program, Abt Associates.

1. Agriculture Terrorism – spreading biological or chemical agents amongst crops or livestock to cause economic harm.
2. Food Supply terrorism – tainting food products with chemical or biological agents that can cause human illness to lead to human casualties or economic harm.

In fact, terrorism can be caused by evoking a high level of fear in the general public that the event has happened, when in fact it may not have. (“We’ve poisoned the milk.”)

Is it even reasonable to think that terrorists would think about attacking our nation’s agriculture? The evidence appears to say yes. Intelligence gathered from various sources indicates that al Qaeda has considered it. According to Senator Susan Collins of Maine, “It definitely is a page in al Qaeda’s playbook.”

It certainly seems reasonable to believe that harming the nation’s food supply could be a component of a terrorist plan.

Peter Chalk, of the Rand Corp. has stated that an attack on agriculture is “a favored form of secondary aggression...the employment of cheap and unsophisticated means to undermine a state’s economic base and possibly overwhelm its public management resources, give livestock and food-related attacks a beneficial cost/benefit payoff that would be of interest to any group...”

This presentation will look at the likelihood of an event happening in Wisconsin, the potential impact on Wisconsin, what is being done to minimize the risk and what steps you can take.

DATCP conducted a survey of county emergency management directors in October 2003 to assess Wisconsin’s county food and agricultural preparedness. Nearly 85% of the respondents felt that it was likely or very likely that a terrorist attack on agriculture or the food supply will occur somewhere in the nation. However, 81% indicated that a terrorist attack is not likely to occur in their county. Further, 60% did not address agriculture in their local response plans.

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It is crucial to understand the importance of agriculture to Wisconsin when determining the state's vulnerability. If the overall impact is minimal, the resulting risk should be small.

Some facts:

- Wisconsin food and fiber production generates an estimated \$40 billion annually to the state's economy.
- One out of every five jobs are tied to agriculture.
- In 2002, Wisconsin produced and marketed milk valued at \$2.66 billion.
- Dairy, livestock and poultry make up nearly three-fourths of the value of all farm commodities produced in Wisconsin.

For example, if milk shipments were suspended from Wisconsin farms, the result would be a daily loss of over \$7 million just to dairy farms.

The impact of an event or threat is far reaching and is not site specific. It is highly unlikely that an event will affect only a specific facility. The entire chain of distribution will feel the impact, including suppliers.

Possible outcomes include:

1. Exports halted.
2. Restricted movement of product.
3. Loss of business, income or market share (over the entire distribution system).
4. Consumer perceptions – they may turn away from product.
5. Full recovery may never happen.
6. Government resources diverted from other priority areas increasing vulnerability elsewhere.

Localized impacts include:

1. No milk shipped, herds or crops destroyed.
2. Loss of farm income.
3. Little or no inputs needed.
4. Loss of farms.
5. Severe impacts on rural communities.

Vulnerability is also linked to security. Agriculture poses some challenges both nationally and in Wisconsin.

1. Crops are grown over large areas that are impossible to secure.
2. Inputs and commodities are handled in bulk, are globally produced and distributed.
3. Industry has become more concentrated.
4. Rapid movement of livestock, animal feed, and grain.
5. Ability to trace back animals is not perfect.

While these were not terrorist events, the following give us a glimpse of the impacts:

1. BSE in Canada and U.S.

2. PPB incident in Michigan (Fire retardant in dairy feed)

The one event we had in Wisconsin (chlordane in animal fat) resulted in disposal of 4,000 tons of animal feed and 500,000 pounds of fat, with a value estimated at \$4 million.

Here is what Wisconsin is doing to minimize our vulnerability:

1. Have in place a long-standing toxic response team and food emergency response team. Consequence management is the goal. The toxic response team was the first in the U.S. and handles up to 20 investigations a year.
2. Combined these teams under a comprehensive plan.
3. Conducted an agriculture vulnerability assessment.
4. Entered into cooperative agreements with other states.
5. Developing regional lab capacity.
6. Increasing and improving resources with federal assistance.
7. Strengthening partnerships at the state and federal levels.
8. Reviewing and refining existing procedures and training.

Certainly these are important actions. Additional steps can and should be taken at the local level. It is important to create an awareness of agriculture locally. Remember that 60% of county emergency response plans did not include agriculture. Local distributors should work with county emergency management to create awareness and understanding of their role. Check your incoming ingredients and only use reputable sources; maintain a good relationship with the producer and know what to do and who to call if a suspected event occurs; know and be able to trace distribution routes; maintain up to date record keeping; provide adequate security; practice biosecurity when visiting agricultural sites; maintain samples of production runs; and contact DATCP if you suspect that an incident has occurred.

If all these steps are taken, collectively we have reduced the vulnerability of Wisconsin agriculture. It is far less likely for an enemy to attack an industry that is prepared, proactive, and vigilant than one that is ill prepared to deal with the consequences. Preparedness also results in public confidence, which reduces the fear which is a precept of terrorism.