

## **National Farm Policy Should Protect Health and Safety of Animals and Plants**

By New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Charles M. Kuperus

The names, by now, are becoming familiar to the public.

Asian longhorned beetle. Emerald ash borer. Avian influenza.

These are among the invasive pests and emerging diseases that can threaten our domestic plant and animal agriculture if we do not maintain vigilance.

As Congress crafts national agricultural policy for the coming year and beyond, it's worthwhile to have a discussion of the issues involved in protecting our agricultural industry to ensure its continued ability to compete in a global marketplace. New Jersey is committed to working with other states to help shape a national farm policy that recognizes the serious consequences that can arise from being less than proactive on plant and animal health and safety.

Clearly, this is a concern for all our states, as each has its unique mix of plant and animal resources it wants to protect. For those of us in states with major ports, however, the threat becomes even more pronounced.

New Jersey is a major entry point for global trade through the United States. The Port of New York/New Jersey, the largest port complex on North America's East Coast, is fueled by continuing increases in trade from all parts of the world.

The introduction of one of the most devastating plant pests in recent memory – the Asian longhorned beetle – was traced to beetle larvae in untreated wood packing materials. Without question, the presence in Asia of the “highly pathogenic” form of Avian Influenza that is transmitted from birds to humans raises additional concerns about the possible introduction to the United States of a disease threat.

As we have seen overseas, the arrival of such diseases can have disastrous effects, devastating entire industries, at least in the short-term. The discovery of a highly pathogenic form of Avian Influenza in the Netherlands in 2003 resulted in the culling of approximately 30 million birds as the virus spread from six poultry farms to 255. One human death and about 80 diseases in humans were connected to that outbreak, according to the World Health Organization.

To be sure, invasive species and non-indigenous diseases don't need to be deadly to humans to cause significant financial impacts. Midwestern states have experienced a devastating problem with the emerald ash borer. This invasive pest arrived in Michigan in 2002, again most likely in untreated wood packing materials from Asia. So far, that pest's larvae have killed more than 20 million ash trees in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. The pest also has been found in Illinois and Maryland.

With the increasing emphasis on free trade and a globalized economy, invasive species or non-indigenous diseases can come from any continent, and our inspection and detection capabilities must be at their height to stop diseases and pests at every entry point.

Fortunately, we have the knowledge and technology to create an effective barrier to the introduction of pests and disease. What is needed is sufficient funding to ensure those methods and devices can be put to their fullest use in protecting our agricultural industries, forest resources and food supply.

Currently, the additional costs that are created by an ever-widening globalization of our economy are not borne by those who benefit most by increased global trade. Instead, our farmers ranchers, local governments and, ultimately, the taxpayers bear those costs.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, our state and others have seen the immense benefits of federal cost-share funds supporting Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Nationwide, pest control represents approximately 34 percent of variable crop-production costs.

Growers here who participated in Rutgers University's Cooperative Research and Extension Fruit IPM Program reduced pesticide use by more than 40 percent over the last decade. Increased investment in IPM is crucial to provide new marketing opportunities and maintain existing export markets while benefiting the environment.

Through vigilance at our points of entry, as well as innovative approaches to dealing with the introduction of diseases and pests, national farm policy can go far in enhancing farm profitability by reducing the costs of dealing with such problems.

Some important programs that help ensure this protection, which would benefit from additional funding and enhanced emphasis, include the National Animal Health Surveillance System (NAHSS) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Together, these programs protect against diseases and pests that can potentially affect the agriculture sector.

The various programs designed to protect our plants and animals work best when there are sufficient commitment and resources to ensure federal, state and local surveillance. Investment in research and development, as well as the technological tools needed to support these efforts, must be a priority in national agricultural policy.

Through free trade and a globalized economy, our world has become smaller, and the diseases and pests once confined to far-off lands now have more direct and faster routes onto our shores. These pests and diseases can devastate our agricultural industry, diminish natural resources, and even take lives.

National farm policy should reflect the urgency created by this new world reality, and contain the emphasis and funding needed to protect the health and safety of our plants, animals and food supply.

