

Homeland Security and Agriculture Issues Intersect: Agro-Terrorism Bills Introduced in Both Chambers; House Committee to Hold Markup



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Legislative Activity

Homeland Security and Agriculture Issues Intersect: Agro-Terrorism Bills Introduced in Both Chambers; House Committee to Hold Markup

This week, the House Homeland Security Committee will mark up a bill, H.R. 1238, the “Securing Our Agriculture and Food Act,” introduced on February 28 by Reps. David Young (R-IA), Donald Payne, Jr. (D-NJ), and Daniel Donovan (R-NY). On March 2, Sens. Pat Roberts (R-KS), chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Claire McCaskill (D-MO), ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, introduced S. 500, a companion bill. These bills seek to increase collaboration between federal agencies to better prepare them to respond to acts of terrorism to the nation’s food supply. Specifically, the legislation would require the Department of Homeland Security’s Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs to lead national, coordinated efforts to respond to threats and acts of terrorism to the nation’s food, agriculture, and veterinary systems.

In the 114th Congress, Rep. Young introduced a nearly identical bill, H.R. 5346, which passed the House in late 2016; however, the bill was not considered by the Senate. This legislation reportedly stemmed from a recent avian influenza outbreak that set records as the largest animal disease outbreak in the history of several of the 15 affected states.

Between December 2014 and June 2015, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) spread throughout the United States, largely affecting commercial flocks of layer hens and turkeys, as well as some backyard flocks. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported more than 50 million birds were affected in the West and Midwest.

According to Rep. Young, weaknesses were uncovered during the federal government's response to the HPAI outbreak. Realizing such weaknesses existed in the nation's ability to coordinate efforts to combat a large animal disease outbreak, it triggered serious reservations regarding the federal government's ability to adequately respond to agro-terrorism threats and attacks, therefore prompting the need for federal legislation.

As H.R. 1238 is bipartisan and uncontroversial, the House Homeland Security Committee is likely to favorably report the legislation by voice vote.

This Week's Committee Activities:

- On Wednesday, March 8, the House Homeland Security Committee has scheduled a markup of H.R. 1238, the "Securing Our Agriculture and Food Act."
- On Thursday, March 9, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research has scheduled a hearing titled "RE: The Next Farm Bill: Specialty Crops." The witnesses will be announced.
- On Thursday, March 9, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit has scheduled a hearing titled "RE: The Next Farm Bill Rural Development & Energy Programs." The witnesses will be announced.

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