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Congressman Barrow: “America Must Do More to Protect Our Food Supply”

Athens, GA – At a Homeland Security Committee field hearing held today on the campus of the University of Georgia, Georgia Congressmen John Barrow, John Linder, Charlie Norwood, and David Scott joined with various federal, state, and local representatives to discuss ways to improve coordination strategies aimed at preventing and responding to either the outbreak of a zoonotic disease or an agroterror attack on America’s food supply.

“Agroterrorism is a subject that needs more attention,” Barrow said at the hearing. “No industry is more American than agriculture, and none is more vital to our economy. A terrorist attack on the agriculture industry could be a low-cost but highly effective means of destroying the economy of the United States, and that’s right up al Qaeda’s alley.”

In a 2003 hearing by the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs evidence was detailed showing that the United State’s agriculture and food supply had been potential al Qaeda targets since 2002, when terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan were found to contain agricultural documents and manuals describing ways to make animal and plant poisons.

Agriculture accounts for \$1 trillion in the nation’s annual economic activity, making up one-sixth of the country’s gross national product. Nationwide, one in eight Americans works in the Agricultural industry. In Georgia, that ratio is one in six.

“It is critical to our economy and to our homeland security that the government does everything possible to prevent accidental or deliberate introduction of potentially destructive organisms in the United States,” Barrow said.

Witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) spoke at today’s hearing and stressed the need for greater coordination between federal and state agencies in order to help improve accurate and timely inspections, establish uniform agricultural examination standards, and provide adequate funding for interagency prevention procedures.

Witnesses from the State of Georgia also testified at the hearing about the front line efforts being undertaken to help prevent agroterrorism and keep dangerous zoonotic diseases from emerging in the here in Georgia.

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