

**Statement of**

**Meg Scott Phipps**

**Commissioner, North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer  
Services**

**before the**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
on**

**Transferring USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
(APHIS) to the proposed Department of Homeland Security**

**Wednesday, June 26, 2002**

**10:00am**

**Representing the Southern Association of State Departments of  
Agriculture (SASDA)**

Statement of

Meg Scott Phipps  
Commissioner, North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

before the

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
on

Transferring USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to the  
proposed Department of Homeland Security

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

10:00am

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to address the full House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress. The willingness of the committee to hear the testimony from the State Departments of Agriculture is greatly appreciated.

As the chief advocate and spokesperson for North Carolina agriculture, I would be falling short of my duties if I did not portray the importance of agriculture and agribusiness to the state of North Carolina. Agribusiness is the number one industry in our state. Our farm gate income is approximately 7.4 billion dollars annually, providing the foundation for an agribusiness economy of 59.2 billion annually employing more than 20 percent of the state's workforce. Within the last ten years, North Carolina agriculture has transformed into an increasing livestock oriented economy with poultry and swine as the leading commodities. On the plant side of the equation, tobacco is

now second to the nursery industry. Overall North Carolina currently ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> among all states in commodity diversification.

Mr. Chairman, when asked whether or not the role of APHIS is important to North Carolina, **I must reply – “absolutely yes”**. The primary role of APHIS is to protect the health of the nation’s domestic animal and plant population. As previously stated, North Carolina is largely dependent on an agribusiness economy based upon both animals and plants and is therefore truly influenced by the role of APHIS.

The issue of transferring all or part of APHIS from USDA to Homeland Security raises a series of questions that need to be addressed. The primary question is what will happen to the already forged relationship between State Departments of Agriculture and APHIS in the prevention and spread of diseases and pests that affect our animal and plant agricultural sectors. While the threat of a terrorist attack is serious, naturally occurring and internationally recognized pests and diseases from everyday commerce could devastate our country’s agricultural economy. Internationally and domestically, we have seen the negative economic impacts of Avian Influenza, Pseudorabies, Karnal Bunt, Citrus Canker, Boll Weevil, Medfly, Gypsy Moth, Brucellosis and other pests and diseases.

Today, a proven relationship between USDA APHIS, State Departments of Agriculture, the private business sector and the scientific community has been successful in defending our country’s agricultural interests. These mutual efforts could be even more successful with adequate funding and resources. North Carolina is very proud of our relationship with APHIS and especially in serving as the home for the APHIS Center for Plant Health located in Raleigh.

However, recent domestic program activities within USDA and APHIS have not been able to meet the needs of twenty-first century agriculture due to limited resources. Any potential shift of agency components will likely further contribute to the lack of emphasis in this area. At the present time, individual states do not have the capabilities to fill in these gaps. If APHIS is transferred to Homeland Security, additional erosion of support for these essential program activities is likely.

The unique relationship of APHIS with the agricultural community is paramount in order to maintain safe commerce for our agricultural products and to provide adequate security of our country's food and fiber resources. It is essential that the current role of APHIS in issuing sanitary and phytosanitary inspection certificates be continued to ensure the quality and wholesomeness of our agricultural products to international customers. APHIS also plays a key role by working with importers to prevent the importation of harmful pests and diseases that would devastate our agricultural economy.

The responsibilities of APHIS, and their cooperators within state agriculture departments, encompass issues more far reaching than bio-terrorism and foreign animal disease. Failure to support these initiatives would jeopardize our nation's health status and result in severe negative economic impacts.

North Carolina pioneered the concept of Homeland Security, creating the Emergency Programs Division in August 2001. It is the lead Division for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services involving acts of terrorism and other emergencies. Through its multi-hazard initiative, it coordinates with Department of Health and Human Services, State Emergency Management, State Bureau of

Investigation, North Carolina National Guard, the U.S. military, and other allied agencies.

The State Veterinarian, the Plant Protection Division, and the Emergency Programs Division maintain constant communication for increased effectiveness and efficiency. An effective department-wide emergency notification system and action plan is administered for all Divisions through Emergency Programs without the need to incorporate those Divisions into one unit.

I encourage you to establish a USDA **liaison** APHIS office in the new Department of Homeland Security. This would result in the communication, coordination, and collaboration necessary to achieve national homeland security. One option could include: the new Department of Homeland Security having its own security officials housed at international points of entry and functioning in close cooperation with APHIS managers and officers to ensure a homeland security presence.

Mr. Chairman, it is our position to be supportive of a strong homeland security system. However, it is also our duty to protect and support a safe national food supply. It is our strong opinion that APHIS should remain in USDA to assure that these vital support services and programs maintain their focus on U.S. agriculture. We also believe that APHIS is already providing a key role in the security of our country and this role **should not be jeopardized**. Without a safe and secure supply of food and fiber, the citizens of the United States could find themselves hostage to an even greater evil than the terror attacks of September 11, 2001.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today before the U.S. House Agriculture Committee on the importance of APHIS to agriculture.

