Science Societies

USDA releases action plan for farm, research security

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> Last week, USDA released its National Farm Security Action Plan, identifying agriculture as critical infrastructure and emphasizing its role in national security. The report identifies threats to agriculture from foreign adversaries, cyberattacks, bioterrorism, and supply chain vulnerabilities. The plan also outlines specific actions USDA will undertake, in coordination with other government agencies, to protect American farmland, enhance agricultural supply chain resilience, safeguard nutrition programs, secure research, and strengthen domestic agricultural productivity.

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Themes and actions

1. Promote agricultural and economic prosperity ?

- Secure and protect American farmland:
    - Reform the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) process, including online filing systems and increased penalties for false filings.
    - End farmland purchases by nationals from countries of concern.
    - Coordinate with the Department of Treasury on foreign transactions involving farmland.
    - Launch an online portal for reporting adversarial foreign influence in farmland purchases.
- Enhance agricultural supply chain resilience:
    - Identify critical agricultural inputs and materials with federal partners.
    - Conduct assessments of supply chain vulnerabilities, including crisis simulations.
    - Modernize import restrictions to prevent harmful pathogens from entering the U.S.

- Protect nutrition safety net programs:
    - Strengthen enforcement measures to prevent fraud and abuse in programs like SNAP.
    - Disqualify retailers complicit in SNAP fraud.
    - Partner with law enforcement to combat benefit-trafficking and card skimming.

2. Defend the foundations of agriculture and food ?

- Enhance research security:
    - Ensure USDA-funded research benefits American farmers and prevents collaboration with foreign adversaries.
    - Implement measures to protect intellectual property and prevent technology transfers to adversaries.
- Evaluate USDA programs to ensure "America First" policies:

- Prevent foreign adversaries from accessing USDA programs like SBIR, STTR, and BioPreferred.

3. Strengthen domestic agricultural productivity

- Safeguard plant and animal health:
  - Strengthen response to agricultural biosecurity threats with federal and SLTT partners.
  - Partner with DARPA to fund research promoting military readiness and agricultural security.
  - Focus research on vaccines, therapeutics, and methods to combat diseases and invasive pests.
- Protect critical infrastructure:
  - Collaborate with private companies to protect against cybersecurity threats.
  - Work with law enforcement and intelligence communities to advocate for agricultural security.

- Develop a 21st-century agro-defense workforce through higher education programs.

Also last week, USDA issued an "America First" memorandum outlining directives to prioritize U.S. interests in all USDA funding and partnerships. The memo directs USDA to review all current agreements for connections to foreign persons or entities, outlines a process to assess how future arrangements with foreign persons or entities should be evaluated, and details enhanced research security measures for USDA employees and those who receive USDA research funding.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA will continue to monitor this initiative and update Society members.

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