

Information to Legislative Council Committee on Disaster Response
Testimony of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer
Protection

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about the various efforts the WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is working on with respect to disaster planning and disaster assistance. My name is Robin Schmidt and I serve as the DATCP agency liaison for food and agriculture security in the Office of Secretary. Part of my responsibility is to ensure that the agency emergency response plans are coordinated both within the agency and with other state, local and industry disaster response plans. With me today is Dr. Paul McGraw, the WI Assistant State Veterinarian and Steve Steinhoff, our Administrator of Food Safety, and Keeley Moll, our legislative liaison.

Quick notes of information about agriculture: Agriculture adds \$51 billion to the state's economy. First responders in an agriculture disaster or response are not typically police and fire departments, but veterinarians or food inspectors who may be state employees. Food and agriculture are systems and not individual facilities when it comes to identifying and protecting food and agriculture as a critical infrastructure. Agriculture responses are a little different than traditional responses in that they are often slow to diagnose, last longer (years) and are rarely a local/county event.

DATCP responds routinely to a variety of emergencies that occur throughout the year and throughout the state. We have various types of inspectors located throughout the state that are our "first responders" with respect to food safety, animal health emergencies, and unscrupulous trade practices that may take advantage of individuals affected by a disaster. These staff are critical when there are power outages, other disruptions in service or in simply assisting local responders as a disaster unfolds. And when a disaster does occur, DATCP operates a Farm Center which provides referral assistance to farmers who are in need as a result of a disaster situation. Our response staff have been trained in the Incident Command System at the 100, 200, 300 and 400 level.

DATCP has been very active in the past year creating and updating a number of emergency response plans. Earlier this summer, DATCP completed the State Emergency Response Plan Emergency Support Function

#11 relating to Food and Agriculture which identifies the various parties that have a role to play in a food and agriculture emergency. In addition, we developed a State Food Emergency Response Plan which we recently presented to the North Central Association of Food and Drug Officials, an agency continuity of operations plan. We are also initiating our pandemic planning process to ensure that we are able to complete all critical tasks during a pandemic situation.

We recently submitted a grant for HS funding to help us develop additional plans relating to the implementation of an animal quarantine, stop movement order or product hold order, and to identify and define the food distribution system in Wisconsin so that during an emergency we as a state will be able to work with the private sector in securing adequate food and water supplies for our citizens.

Other activities that we have been working on with the private sector, include participating in the Wisconsin Agro-Security Resource Network (also known as WARN). As Tom Thieding discussed, WARN is a network of agriculture and government groups to facilitate an industry-wide awareness and response to an animal health emergency or crisis incident involving agriculture. WARN is included in DATCP emergency response plans as the link between government and industry. We are very optimistic that this group will greatly enhance Wisconsin's response capabilities as they relate to food and agriculture. By working with WARN, we will minimize impacts to our citizens by communicating consistent messages and by serving as a partner in identifying and obtaining resources that may be needed during an emergency.

DATCP is working through the WARN network as we revise our plans and when we conduct exercises – in particular we are working together to plan an exercise in the near future with the WARN group to test their response plan and we are working to have WARN included as part of our joint information center, or JIC, which would be activated during an emergency.

In addition to the WARN group, DATCP Division of Animal Health has also established a network of veterinarian professionals who can provide assistance during an animal health emergency. This Vet Corps has received training in the Incident Command System of emergency management, and will be an important part of an animal emergency response. For example, members of the Vet Corps may be called upon to help in pet management

during a large-scale disaster, or may be part of our response efforts for a large foreign animal disease outbreak.

It's important to remember that DATCP is part of the system of disaster response as spearheaded by Wisconsin Emergency Management. DATCP serves both on the Homeland Security Council as well as on the WI Emergency Management Interagency Workgroup which brings together state agencies to discuss disaster planning and response capabilities. Through that workgroup, we discuss other Emergency Response Plan Emergency Support Functions including those on evacuations and sheltering, and will provide support in those areas where appropriate. Our public information officers work closely with WEM in support when an incident occurs, including working in the emergency operations center in response to Hurricane Katrina.

We exercise together in nuclear power plant drills, invite local emergency management officials to our agriculture related exercises, and communicate with other agencies in our responses and planning efforts. Some of our most recent exercises have focused on carcass disposal, quarantines and food emergency responses. We are invited by the USDA Farm Services Agency along with WEM to participate in the State Emergency Board meetings to discuss agriculture disaster situations including drought and flooding issues.

Lastly, DATCP is an active member of the Multi-State Partnership for Agriculture Security, which is a consortium of approximately 14 states who are working together on agriculture emergency response issues, including cross-border communications, resource sharing and response capabilities. Later this winter, we will be participating in a multi-state "virtual" exercise with the partnership to further practice and enhance our cross-border capabilities.

In addition, the partnership is hosting a meeting in December to discuss various states legal authorities for responding in an agriculture emergency so that we can learn from each others experiences and identify areas where we may need legal enhancements. One specific challenge for us at DATCP is that the carcass disposal statute, ch. 95.50, Wis. Stats, is outdated and we have identified changes that we need in order to manage a animal disease outbreak based on current science. If this committee recommends statutory changes to enhance our disaster response capabilities, we would be happy to

work with you on the changes that we believe are necessary relating to carcass disposal.

The best way we can assure a successful response to a disaster is to ensure that we have the communications, roles and responsibilities established in advance of a disaster. We must continue to work together in planning, exercising and responding to disasters and ensuring that we have the resources and authorities to do what is needed.

Thank you for your time and we would be happy to answer any specific questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted:

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WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
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