

Agro-defense: Experts worry US could be caught off-guard by a biological attack on agriculture

The U.S. is woefully unprepared to cope with outbreaks of emerging livestock or crop pathogens and pests, whether those outbreaks are caused intentionally or otherwise, experts told the Senate Agriculture Committee....

Agricultural security risks have become a major concern for Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts, R-Kan., but the chairman acknowledged that talking about a possible attack on agriculture or food production is a hard conversation.

"This is a difficult issue because if you come out and say what's on your mind, you scare the dickens out of people," Roberts said.

Roberts said when he first became interested in the issue nearly two decades ago through his work on a Senate subcommittee on emerging threats, he kept telling farm organizations, veterinarians and others about the need to step up and examine the risk. The response, he said, was people asked him to quit talking about agro-security risks because it could affect commodity prices.

"Well, we should look out. I can promise you every member of this committee is aware of this threat," Roberts said.

Experts ... pointed to a recent report in the Washington Post that North Korean dictator Kim Jung Un is building up his country's biological infrastructure, based on an intelligence report. North Korea's new efforts in biological warfare have alarmed U.S. analysts, the Post reported.

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