

## Pentagon DARPA program targeting crop losses could turn insects into 'easily weaponized' biological army, critics claim

The Pentagon is studying whether insects can be enlisted to combat crop loss during agricultural emergencies. The bugs would carry genetically engineered viruses that could be deployed rapidly if critical crops such as corn or wheat became vulnerable to a drought.

...

The program, funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), has a warm and fuzzy name: "Insect Allies." But some critics find the whole thing creepy.

A team of skeptical scientists and legal scholars published [an article in the journal Science](#) on [October 4] arguing that the Insect Allies program opens a "Pandora's box" and involves technology that "may be widely perceived as an effort to develop biological agents for hostile purposes and their means of delivery." A [website](#) created by the critics puts their objection more bluntly: "The DARPA program is easily weaponized."

...

DARPA's program manager for Insect Allies, Blake Bextine, pushed back on the Science article, saying the program is solely for peaceful purposes, has been reviewed by government agencies responsible for agricultural safety and has multiple layers of safeguards built into the research protocols, including total containment of the insects.

"I don't think that the public needs to be worried. I don't think that the international community needs to be worried," Bextine told The Washington Post.

**Read full, original post:** [The Pentagon is studying an insect army to defend crops. Critics fear a bioweapon.](#)