

**“BE ALERT, BUT
DON’T PANIC”**



AGRISCIENCE

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“Be alert, but don’t panic.” While growing up, my dad consistently mentioned these words as we were headed into the hardwoods near Pawnee, Oklahoma where my grandpa has a few thousand acres of farmland that we hunt on. Whether it was sitting in a deer stand for hours on end or standing in the icy waters of a duck pond, my dad always reminded me, “Alex, there’s a good chance we might not get anything today.” But when that deer would walk onto the field or those ducks would land just short of our decoys, my heart would start pumping and well, I’d start to get a little nervous and that’s when I would remember those five very important words, “Be alert, but don’t panic”.

Well just like hunting in the fields and duck ponds with my dad as a kid, we as agriculturists need to be alert about one very important issue. I’m talking about agro-terrorism. In brief, agro-terrorism is the use of any biological agents against crops, livestock or poultry. The agent could be anything such as pathogens, including anthrax, brucellosis, hoof and mouth, or wheat rust, just for example. Since the events of 9/11, Mad Cow disease outbreaks in Canada, as well as the recent H1N1 scare have made the possibilities of potential threats to our nation and its most vital industry a stark reality.

According to CBS reporter Bob Orr, nearly 300 people were sick before the salmonella outbreak of 2007 could be traced to a peanut butter processor in Georgia. Two hundred others were ill and three people had died by the time scientists traced an E. coli contamination to California spinach. The National Pork Council reported in 2009 that the pork industry had lost an estimated 20 billion dollars before the two words “swine flu”

effort, our goal of eradicating any potential agro-terrorism threats becomes much more realistic. For the agricultural industry, our purpose should be to protect our food supply and our products so that the minds of American consumers can be at ease. These scares are cause of economic damage, social unrest, and loss of confidence in government and the agricultural industry.

With the great impact that media has on the agricultural industry today; I feel it is imperative that we do everything we can to help prevent any bad publicity. For example, this past summer, a documentary movie was released that targeted industrialized agriculture. Since that time, many from the agricultural industry have been forced to challenge the validity of the questions raised in the minds of consumers. Again, the phrase "be alert but don't panic" comes to mind.

In the past five years, "food defense" has received increasing attention in the counterterrorism and bio-terrorism communities. Laboratory and response capacity are being upgraded to address the reality of agroterrorism, and national response plans now incorporate agroterrorism as well. People more generally associate bio-terrorism with outbreaks of human illness such as, anthrax or smallpox, rather than diseases affecting animals or plants. Evidence that agriculture and food are potential Al-Qaeda targets came in 2002 when terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan were found containing agricultural documents and manuals describing ways to make animal and plant poisons.

From 2001 to the present, terrorism as a whole isn't going away and terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda are becoming more and more creative in finding ways to harm

U.S. citizens. As simple as it was for my dad to say, "Son, be alert, but don't panic", those few words alone gave me a comfortable barrier to fall back on when I was nervous. The U.S. Agriculture Industry needs to listen, to those five simple words "Be alert, but don't panic", and give us, citizens of the United States of America a comfortable barrier to fall back on.

Thank You!

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