

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2004

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge:

It was with our great disappointment that we learned of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) decision not to accept the University of Missouri-Columbia's proposal for the Homeland Security Centers on Agroterrorism. You will recall that the proposed consortium included outstanding universities from Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois and Mississippi, as well as Missouri. While another site has been chosen for this center, we urge you to consider the merits of Missouri's proposal as DHS research priorities are selected in the coming months.

We strongly believe that the University of Missouri and its team have much to contribute to improve our nation's defenses against agroterrorism. Located in the nation's heartland, which is responsible for 70% of the nation's agricultural output, it represents the region with the most to lose from agroterrorism, and with the most at stake in the success of agroterrorism research.

As you know, the University of Missouri's proposal incorporates the efforts of not just the entire University of Missouri system, but also the world-renowned expertise of Washington University, the Midwest Research Institute, and the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center. Together, these institutions are well-positioned to assist DHS in a number of important areas.

Teaming with Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Missouri is poised to develop and deploy an efficient and effective network of vaccines to protect humans and livestock from a variety of biological agents. Together, these universities offer an established network of experts in food animal disease as well as immunology. Their research has the potential to produce compounds that would improve immune function and increase the efficacy of therapeutic vaccine strategies.

In addition, ongoing research at these universities is developing sensitive detection systems for human and animal pathogens. In order to combat bioterror effectively in our farms and fields, a 24-hour monitoring and detection system that provides reliable results is needed at critical control points throughout our food system. Combined with increased

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Page 2 of 2

vigilance, provisional containment measures developed concurrently with the monitoring system can limit the spread of food animal disease and its disruptive effects on trade.

As we continue to feel the fallout from a single confirmed case of BSE in late 2003, it is clear that the impact of food animal disease on our food system is magnified by public perception. As such, it is necessary to model the expected economic consequences of alternative disease management strategies to ensure that policymakers have all necessary information before any possible outbreak. The Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute (FAPRI), a world-renowned agricultural economic modeling consortium based at the University of Missouri-Columbia, is uniquely qualified to provide accurate and timely data to forecast the market impacts of any selected biosecurity policy.

Finally, the University of Missouri's Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory has teamed with private industry to develop a software system capable of operating an early warning system for a biological attack or naturally occurring disease outbreak. Creating a system analogous to that used by the nation's public health departments, this software would link state and university veterinary diagnostic laboratories on a national basis. This software link would then securely manage information flows and provide automatic alerting for specific disease outbreaks on a nationwide basis.

As you can see, the proposal submitted by the University of Missouri is outstanding in its science, and comprehensive in the participation and support it has received from across the state. Accordingly, we urge you to consider the University's capabilities and the merits of its proposal and identify a significant role for the University of Missouri as research priorities are selected in the coming months.

Many thanks in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

