

## Expert warns of food-supply attacks

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From the Des Moines Register -----  
Expert warns of food-supply attacks Posted at 12:01 on 09/21/2001

A leading food researcher warned today that the nation may be subject to “agriterrorism” with the food supply more vulnerable because of huge livestock production facilities.

“The way American animals have been raised, they may be more susceptible to disease,” said Dr. Kenneth Quinn, president of the World Food Prize Foundation. “There are many different agents that could be used to infect animals and plants.”

Quinn said agriculture officials need to heighten monitoring efforts to detect disease at the first sign, and move to isolate any infections quickly.

“We have to consider the threat, the possibility of bioterrorism and agriterrorism real, even though we don’t know for sure exactly what the terrorists have planned,” Quinn said.

The trend in American agriculture has been toward increasing concentration, with larger grain farms and giant livestock production facilities with thousands of animals under the same roof and that would speed the spread of any disease, he warned.

Quinn spoke during a taping of Iowa Public Television’s “Iowa Press” program to be aired on Sunday. He brings expertise to the issue, as a former State Department foreign service officer who once served as Ambassador to Cambodia.

American grain producers got a taste of what could happen last year when an unapproved strain of genetically altered corn got into the nation’s corn supply. The mixup disrupted export markets and cost farmers billions of dollars.

“They could very well be looking to taint our animals and our crops,” Quinn said. “Once you plant fear in a country that its plants have become diseased, that its animals are diseased ... suddenly there is great fear and a reaction abroad and American agricultural exports could become severely stymied.”

Quinn said Iowa Agriculture Secretary Patty Judge already has conducted a training exercise to practice steps to be taken should an outbreak of disease strike, and he called for more such efforts.

“We have to be prepared for anything that comes next,” he said. “That means putting in place mechanisms for response, and practicing them.”

In reaction to the attacks in New York and Washington, most attention has been focused on airline safety, but that may not be the nation's real vulnerability, Quinn warned. "I don't think we know exactly what the terrorists are planning next, we just know they are planning something. My sense is they are going to be planning something different."

Attacking the nation's food supply would be in line with terrorist goals of weakening America's economy, and would be a psychological blow by striking at America's heartland. He called for quick-response teams.

"It has to be all the way down to the state level, to the county level to the farm level and to the farm cooperative level to isolate contamination to the extent possible," Quinn said.

-- Anonymous, September 21, 2001