

"Food Security Begins at the Farm"

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For years, we have been trying to remind consumers that food does not “begin” at the grocery store, but at the farm. As such, we need to remember that the security of our food also begins at the farm. Michigan and the rest of the nation’s agricultural industry are now examining vulnerabilities to the food supply line from farm to table. We must remember that producers, processors, suppliers, and retailers all have a key role in protecting the nation’s food supply.

The response from a national web survey performed by the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), showed that many farmers believe the agriculture and food system in the US could be a likely target of terrorists. However, like most humans, we do not see ourselves being a victim of an unfortunate event, and the majority of farmers responded in that fashion stating that it is probably unlikely that their farm would be the one hit by terrorists.

At the same time however, more dairy and livestock producers have already become more protective of their operations by limiting, or no longer allowing “farm tours”. This biosecurity approach may have been boosted by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Europe. But by using this method to stop a natural disease from entering a herd, limiting who can enter an animal operation also works to help reduce the chance of an intentional introduction of an infectious pathogen. These agrosecurity measures are not just being implemented on animal operations. Greenhouses, nurseries, food processors, retailers, and other links in the food and agricultural supply line are also taking steps toward better security.

For some time now, the Michigan Department of Agriculture has been leading an effort to protect the Michigan food supply “from farm to fork”. Among the participating agencies are Michigan Farm Bureau, commodity groups, retailers, processors, law enforcement, and various units at MSU including MSU Extension, the MSU College of Veterinary Medicine, the MSU School of Criminal Justice, and others. These government, university, and private industry groups realize that security of our food supply must begin now, not after a terrorist event has taken place. And by working together, we can speak in one voice that will help demonstrate that the security of our food supply is of utmost importance.