



Highlights of [GAO-06-644](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. agriculture generates over \$1 trillion in annual economic activity, but concerns exist about the sector's vulnerability to a natural or deliberate introduction of foreign livestock, poultry, and crop pests and disease. Under the Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI) program, international passengers and cargo are inspected at U.S. ports of entry to seize prohibited material and intercept foreign agricultural pests. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 transferred AQI inspections from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and left certain other AQI responsibilities at USDA. GAO examined (1) the extent to which USDA and DHS have changed the inspection program since the transfer, (2) how the agencies have managed and coordinated their responsibilities, and (3) how funding for agricultural inspections has been managed since the transfer.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that DHS identify and assess the major risks posed by foreign pests and disease and develop and implement a national staffing model to ensure that staff levels are sufficient to meet those risks and that DHS and USDA analyze the full cost of performing AQI inspections and ensure that user fees cover the program's costs. USDA and DHS generally agreed with the report's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-644.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Daniel Bertoni at (202) 512-3841 or bertonid@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Management and Coordination Problems Increase the Vulnerability of U.S. Agriculture to Foreign Pests and Disease

What GAO Found

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, federal agencies' roles and responsibilities were modified to help protect agriculture. In March 2003, more than 1,800 agriculture specialists within USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) became DHS Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees, while USDA retained responsibility for AQI activities such as setting inspection policy, providing training, and collecting user fees. Since the transfer, the agencies have expanded training on agriculture issues for CBP officers and agriculture specialists. CBP and APHIS also have taken steps to enable agriculture specialists to better target shipments and passengers for inspections and established a process to assess how CBP agriculture specialists are implementing AQI policy. Finally, CBP created a new agriculture liaison position in each of its district field offices to advise regional directors on agricultural issues.

While these are positive steps, the agencies face management and coordination problems that increase the vulnerability of U.S. agriculture to foreign pests and disease. CBP has not developed sufficient performance measures that take into account the agency's expanded mission or consider all pathways by which prohibited agricultural items or foreign pests may enter the country. Specifically, although CBP's measures focus on two pathways that pose a risk to U.S. agriculture, they do not consider other key pathways such as commercial aircraft, vessels, and truck cargo. Also, although CBP has hired more than 630 specialists since the transfer, it has not yet developed or used a risk-based staffing model to ensure that adequate numbers of agriculture specialists are staffed to areas of greatest vulnerability. CBP also has not used available inspection and interception data to evaluate the performance of the AQI program. CBP and APHIS also continue to experience difficulty in sharing information such as key policy changes and urgent inspection alerts, and CBP has allowed the number and proficiency of agriculture canine units to decline.

Although APHIS is legally authorized (though not required) to charge AQI user fees to cover program costs, we found that the agencies have not taken the necessary steps to ensure that user fees cover AQI costs. Consequently, the agencies had to use other authorized funding sources to pay for the program. Also, because of weaknesses in the design of CBP's new financial management system, CBP was unable to provide APHIS with information on the actual costs of the AQI program by user-fee type—for example, fees paid by international air passengers. APHIS uses this information to set future user-fee rates. Finally, in fiscal years 2004 and 2005, APHIS did not transfer AQI funds to CBP as agreed to by both agencies, causing some ports of entry to reduce spending on inspection activities in fiscal year 2005.