

BIOSECURITY, BORDERS AND TRADE: COMMONALITIES AND COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

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Farm Foundation is pleased to have been able to help you think about this important topic, “Biosecurity, Borders and Trade.” This title sums up the most pressing issues currently facing agriculture and the food system. Collaboration among the tri-national state and provincial government leaders of the food and agricultural sector so important to all of our economies is critical to our ability to protect our food production and marketing system and consumers.

The common themes in today’s discussions have been repeated calls for collaboration and cooperation. They are:

- Necessary to carry out the spirit of NAFTA;
- Critical to maintaining food system biosecurity, while facilitating the continuation of our burgeoning cross-border trade; and
- Important as we take advantage of the heightened attention to border issues in the wake of the September 11 event to improve our food trade infrastructure.

Cooperation and collaborative arrangements are necessary at various levels involving different groups:

- National level agricultural, environmental, and trade ministries or agencies;
- Within countries between national, state or provincial and municipal levels;
- Among private sector agribusinesses, producers, and other sectors; and
- Between government agencies, the private sector and universities.

Biosecurity, borders and trade issues are intertwined, and many of our speakers focused on critical elements to deal with these issues:

- Risk assessment can help guide our allocation of the scarce resources available to assure safety and integrity of our food supply.
- We need to streamline the customs clearance process. We can look for new institutional arrangements to facilitate it, and this may involve consolidation of existing agencies or organizations.
- We must move toward harmonization of regulations, procedures and even domestic policies impacting NAFTA countries. And we must assure that the physical infrastructures involved are improved to accommodate the changing needs and ways of doing business in the food system.
- Innovations being adopted can help us reach these goals. New technologies can improve border inspection procedures and they can increase efficiency by taking the inspection

function to points of origin, then assuring integrity of the shipment from origin to final destination. New biotechnologies can help deal with potential problems, provided we foster rather than hinder its development.

- Information sharing and data transfer can facilitate trade, while improving food safety and biosecurity. Traceability systems must enable recall of any contaminated products and quick elimination of the problem source. This is critical to the ability to prevent human illness; limit the spread of animal and plant diseases; and minimize economic impacts.

My conclusion from listening to today's presentations are that the enthusiasm and opportunity to accomplish the goals of NAFTA are very high. We are moving increasingly toward collaboration and cooperation which will help reduce the tensions and conflicts which occasionally have characterized our first ten years of implementing NAFTA. The events of September 11, the impending disappearance of tariffs under the NAFTA, and the recognition of the mutual benefits of increased trade give increased impetus to move forward.

I appreciate the opportunity to be involved with this forum as one more step forward. Keep up the good work!

5/31/02

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