Agroterrorism: A Florida Perspective

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Abstract

The State of Florida's Agricultural industry has been five hundred years in the making and is the second leading economic producing entity for the state. As agriculture is directly tied to the nation's food supply, it could conceivably become a target of attack in the form of Agroterrorism. A survey instrument was developed and administered to local, state and federal law enforcement members to gauge the impression of vulnerability of the state's agricultural and food supply entities. Recommendations are made for further study of this possibility.

Introduction

Agriculture has enjoyed a long and storied history in the State of Florida. Native Americans were already raising corn, beans and squash when the first Spanish settlers arrived in St. Augustine in 1565 ("Florida Agricultural Museum," 2012). These Spanish settlers brought with them their knowledge of the cattle ranching business and a resilient breed of cattle that quickly grew accustomed to the tropical climate that is enjoyed in Florida ("Florida Agricultural Museum," 2012). This breed eventually became known as the Florida Cracker cattle. This nickname comes from the distinctive sound of the whip favored by the "Florida Cracker" cowboys that drove them to market.

> As a breed, Florida Cracker cattle were shaped primarily by natural selection in an environment that is generally hostile to cattle. This resulted in cattle that were heat-tolerant, long-lived, resistant to parasites and diseases, and productive on the low quality forage that is typical of the grasslands and swamps of the Deep South. ("Florida Agricultural Museum," 2012)

Thus began a booming cattle industry that has long characterized Florida's economic make up. As with any early ranching endeavor, horses were also prevalent. This industry continues to thrive as Florida is home to many Thoroughbred ranches which the racing industry uses as winter training grounds. In fact, Ocala boasts that it is the Horse Capitol of the World.

> More than 200 farms and training centers are devoted to breeding, training and showing breeds such as the Thoroughbred, Paso Fino, Missouri Foxtrotter, Arabian, Morgan, miniature horse, quarter horse, hunter/jumper, and the gentle giants, draft horses among others (Fleischhaker, 2012).

The cattle and horsing industry are very important to Florida's economy. In fact, the cash receipts from cattle and calf marketing totaled $488 million in 2011 ("Florida Agriculture by," 2012, pg. 46).

Many flags have flown over Florida soil, and with each came more diversity in agricultural commodities. British influence can be seen with the introduction of indigo, cotton, rice, citrus, and sugar ("Florida Agricultural Museum", 2012). These and other products became the basis of Florida's economic prosperity then and many remain so today, such as citrus and sugar. Florida accounts for over 63 percent of all citrus produced in the United States at over 7.4 million tons of citrus, which is nearly twice the total tonnage of California grown citrus ("Florida Agriculture by," 2012, pg. 21). Florida also leads the nation in total acreage which is planted in citrus groves at over 540,000 acres. The value of all citrus in the United States for the 2010-2011 growing season was 2.98 billion dollars, Florida citrus accounted for 1.145 billion of that figure ("Florida Agriculture by," 2012, pg. 22).

This is the agricultural legacy that needs to be protected from both natural and man-made disasters.

Literature Review

Life in America changed drastically on September 11, 2001 in the wake of the terroristic attacks which were perpetrated by operatives of Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. National policy has been written and re-written in an effort to make American's feel safe once more on native soil and abroad. Many threats have been discovered and attempts have been made to mitigate these threats, which include increased air travel and border security. One possible target of interest to those who would seek to do harm to the American way of life can be to attack the vast Agricultural network which plays a key part in the United States and Florida economies. Agroterrorism can be defined as follows:

> The deliberate introduction of detrimental agents, biological and otherwise, into the agricultural and food processing system with the intent of causing actual or perceived harm. The broad areas of agriculture that could provide targets in an agroterrorism event are farm animals and livestock, plant crops, and the food processing, distribution, and retailing system (Schneider, Schneider, Webb, Hubbard & Archer, 2005).

According to Schneider et al, in 2007, dairy farmers in the United States earned over 95 billion dollars. Many diseases naturally plague the industry, but a deliberate attack could not only cause immediate financial loss locally, but could also cause

agricultural exports to suffer (Schneider, Schneider, Webb, Hubbard & Archer, 2005). In fact, they indicate that agricultural industries in the United States rely on international trade, citing that nearly 30 percent of all United States agricultural commodities are exported, any interruption could be devastating (Schneider, Schneider, Webb, Hubbard & Archer, 2005). According to Cupp et al, the agricultural industry in the United States also contributes 13 percent to the Gross Domestic Product and employs 15 percent of the American population (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004).

The United States agricultural community and general food supply has been thought to be safe for years (Chapman & Rood, 2009). Americans on average spend less than the global average on general food costs, this can be directly contributed to the efficiency in which agricultural products are produced and distributed (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004). This efficiency also produces a supply chain which is very complex, and due to this complexity, it could possibly be vulnerable to attack (Chapman & Rood, 2009). Such an attack could prove disastrous. Any deliberate disruption to any part of the agricultural or food supply chain could create fear and distrust in the food supply by the general public (Chapman & Rood, 2009). This fear and distrust could cause devastating consequences to the economy.

In 2001, the United Kingdom had a highly publicized outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), which according to Cupp et al "is the most contagious animal disease known, with nearly 100% of exposed animals being infected" (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004). The total economic cost of the outbreak was estimated to be 11 billion dollars in destruction of animals and losses due to trade barriers and loss in tourism (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004). All of this loss was due to a natural outbreak; the deliberate introduction of such a devastating disease could prove to be more detrimental, due to the psychological effects (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004).

Al Qaeda has shown a desire to plan just such attacks. In fact, notes were confiscated from operatives in Afghanistan which indicated that they were planning to use various biological agents to attack the United States food supply (Chapman & Rood, 2009). The notes indicated anti-animal diseases such as FMD, New Castle and Brucellosis, as well as anti-plant diseases such as Rice Blast, Maize Rust and Black Stem Rust (Chapman & Rood, 2009). According to Chapman and Rood, terrorist operatives have already tried to smuggle in vials of blood which contained the FMD disease with the intention of releasing it into livestock populations in the United States. Fortunately, they were caught prior to release by Homeland Security officials (Chapman & Rood, 2009).

The United States leads the world in meat production; in fact these sales are over 50 billion dollars every year (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004). According to Cupp et al, just the slightest indication of FMD can cause severe fiscal losses. In 2001, a news report stated that FMD had been discovered in Kansas and cattle futures dropped drastically. It was later determined that the symptoms shown by the cattle in question were actually caused by hay containing thorns, but not before the erroneous report had caused an estimated 50 million dollar loss to the cattle industry (Cupp, Walker II & Hillison, 2004). Import markets begin to close to countries when their cattle are merely suspected to be infected with this devastating disease.

The Florida tomato industry suffered a similar fiscal blow during the Salmonella outbreak of 2008. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was notified

in May of 2008 of four cases of salmonella poisoning by the New Mexico Department of Health ("Outbreak of salmonella," 2008). During the ensuing investigation by the CDC, they determined that the outbreak ultimately spread to 43 states, the District of Columbia and Canada ("Investigation of outbreak," 2008). In an attempt to get ahead of the spread of the infection, the CDC issued numerous public advisories, in fact, on June 3, 2008, an advisory was issued encouraging consumers to not eat certain tomato varieties in Texas and New Mexico and on June 7, 2008, that advisory was changed to include all states ("Outbreak of Salmonella," 2008).

This advisory was devastating to the Florida tomato industry. During the outbreak, the director of sales for East Coast Brokers and Packers stated that the impact of the outbreak is huge and could ultimately cost the industry hundreds of millions of dollars (Chediak, 2008). He was correct; the outbreak ultimately cost the tomato industry over 150 million dollars ("Lessons learned from," 2009). These losses can be attributed to consumer's fear of buying tomatoes due to the advisories. According to Chediak (2008), one consumer questioned admitted that she would not buy any tomatoes in Florida, even though some varieties were said to be safe. This reluctance to buy tomatoes ultimately caused many boxes of tomatoes to remain in warehouses, even though they had been inspected and found safe ("Tomato growers feel," 2008). Ironically, Florida at the time had begun implementing Tomato Good Agricultural Practices (T-GAP) and Tomato Best Management Practices (T-BMT), which ensure growers and packers follow certain practices to ensure that Florida tomatoes comply with food safety requirements. These practices had been being followed by the industry prior to the salmonella outbreak ("Lessons learned from," 2009).

By the end of the 2008 salmonella outbreak in August of 2008, the CDC had a much clearer picture of where the actual outbreak originated, but not before its earlier reports had done extensive damage to consumer confidence in Fresh from Florida tomatoes. According to Nizza, the CDC's preliminary findings at the end of the outbreak showed that the actual culprit for the outbreak was most likely jalapeno peppers first, and then Serrano peppers, and finally tomatoes were possibly involved early on (Nizza, 2008).

> In a study released in the *New England Journal of Medicine,* scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided detailed evidence linking a nationwide outbreak of Salmonella Saintpaul in 2008 to jalapeno and Serrano peppers, and explained how tomatoes were mistakenly implicated in the early stages of the investigation ("Study vindicates tomatoes," 2011).

Unfortunately, this does nothing to salve the losses to tomato growers nationwide.

This is a clear example of how a naturally occurring outbreak of a fairly common bacteria and the hysteria that created by it can cause severe fiscal and emotional damage on the economy and on the general public. How much more devastating would the effects be if the public were to lose confidence that the government could protect them or their food supply from an outside entity intent on doing harm?

The Florida equine industry is recovering from a quarantine of numerous Ocala based farms after horses tested positive for equine herpes virus (EHV-1) (Medina, 2013). EHV-1 can manifest itself in several forms and ultimately may affect the horse's respiratory system, nervous system and may even cause death (Mannion, 2013). The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services reacted quickly to quarantine affected farms and began to aggressively test horses in an attempt to get ahead of the disease. The first horse showed clinical signs of the disease at the end of February 2013 and as of the end of March 2013, most of the effected farms had been released from quarantine, but it has been reported that the financial fallout from the outbreak remains (Medina, 2013).

From a Florida perspective, agriculture has been shown to be very important for economic prosperity, but who is ultimately responsible for the safety and protection of this industry? According to Moats, first and foremost, the responsibility of first response and management of a terrorist attack falls squarely on the shoulders of local government officials and local first responders (Moats, 2007). Moats goes on to explain that the needs of citizens rests with local communities first, not the federal government (Moats, 2007). Unfortunately, the agricultural communities that have the most to protect often are in the worst position, in personnel, training and equipment, to provide that protection (Moats, 2007).

According to research by Stinson et al, the public expects to be protected from all forms of terrorism and are willing to pay for it, even in areas that they feel are fairly safe. In fact, this study reveals that the public would put more money towards food safety than in transportation safety, citing food supply safety as their highest priority (p.68). Unfortunately in fiscal year 2006, only $238 million was earmarked for USDA to use out of an $8.6 billion budget for defense against catastrophic threats (P. 68).This study goes on to reveal that although most respondents felt that the United States food supply was safe from natural contaminants, few felt confident that the it was safe from a terrorist attack. The study further revealed that most respondents felt that the primary responsible party for the protection of the food supply is the government, both to protect from intentional contamination and to pay for that protection (Stinson, Kinsey, Degeneffe & Ghosh, 2007).

Methods

The purpose of this research was to determine if Florida is prepared to defend an agricultural industry that is so vital to its economic prosperity. A survey instrument was developed, which consisted of 13 questions designed to determine a respondent's understanding of Agroterrorism and their knowledge of their local agencies ability to respond to and mitigate a threat to their agricultural interests.

The survey instrument was sent to the members of the Florida Agricultural Crimes Intelligence Unit (185 recipients) and to the participants of the Senior Leadership Program Class 16 Cohort (33 recipients). This created a survey pool of 218 surveyed, of which 46 responded, therefore creating an overall response rate of 21.1 percent. The survey began May 31, 2013 and was closed on July 5, 2013.

Results

The survey began with two questions meant to provide a baseline of the respondent's knowledge of what the term Agroterrorism means. The first asked if the respondent had ever heard of the term Agroterrorism prior to responding to the survey and the second asked the respondent to pick their best understanding of the term based on four possible responses. All 46 respondents answered both questions.

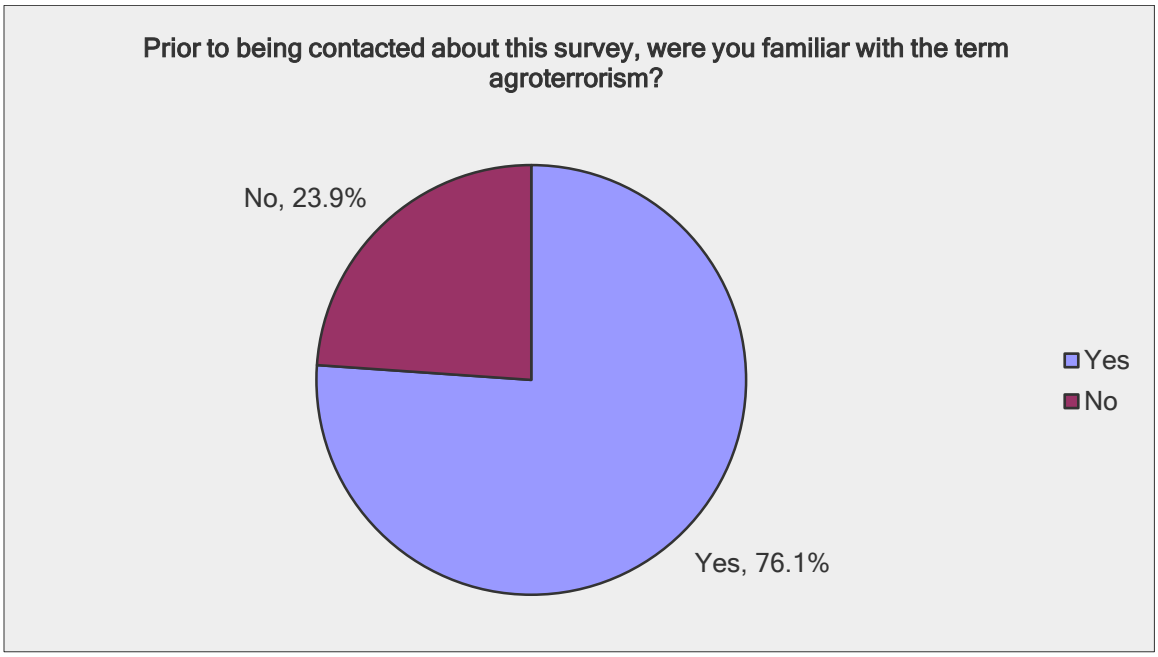


Figure 1

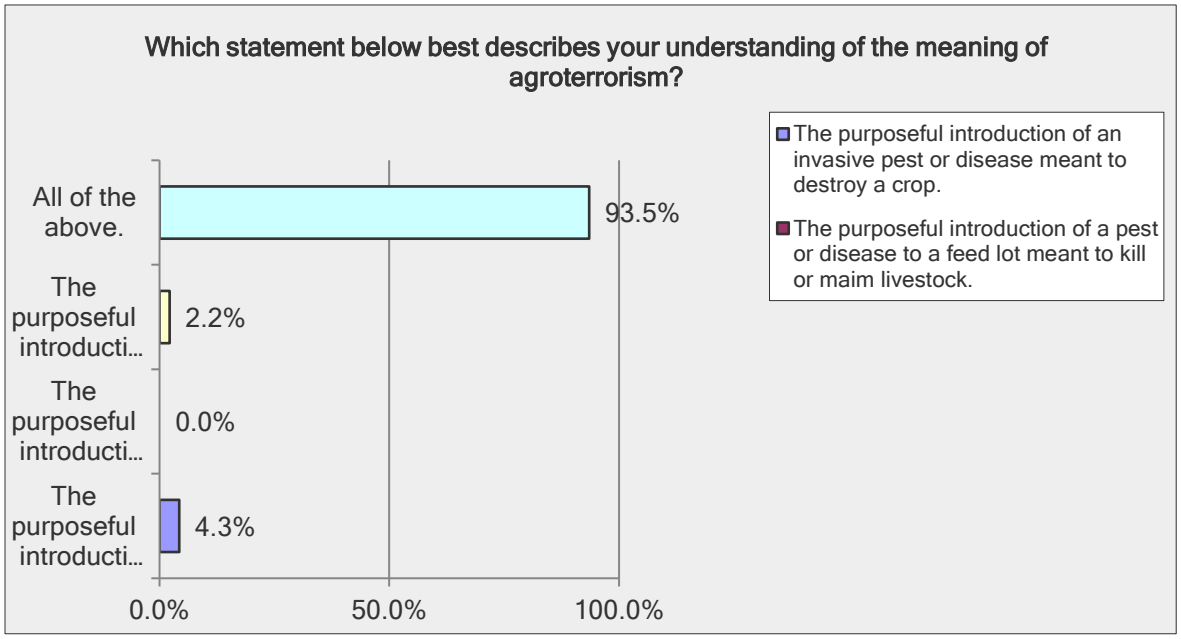
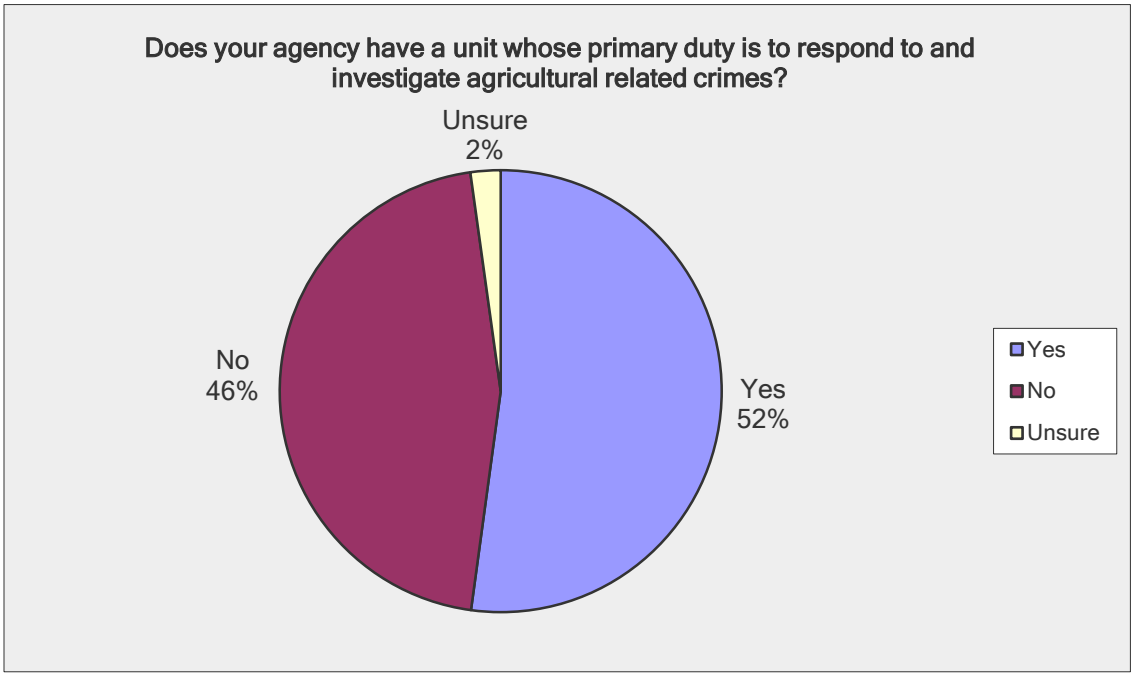


Figure 2

The next two questions queried the respondents' knowledge of whether or not their agency has a unit whose primary mission is dedicated to agricultural related crimes and if so, how many officers are dedicated to that mission. There was a one hundred percent response rate on the first question. Those who answered yes to the first were then requested to respond to the next question. Of the 46 surveyed, 25 answered and 21 skipped the follow up question.



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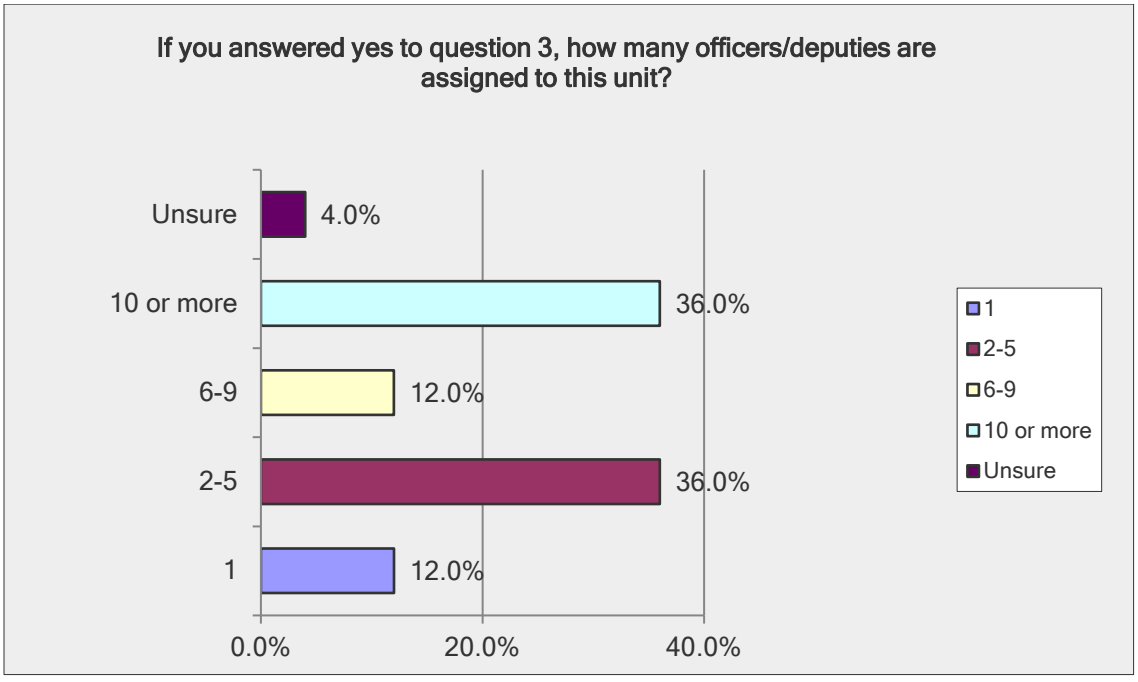
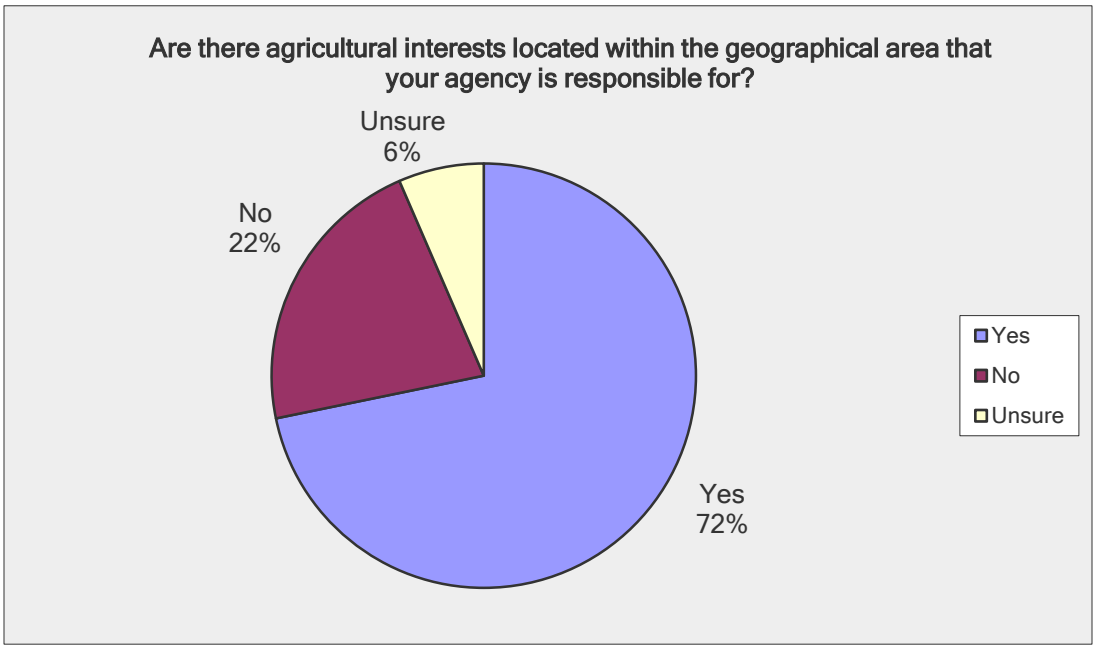


Figure 4

The next two questions queried the respondents knowledge of the service area which their agency is responsible, in an attempt to ascertain if it includes what could described as agricultural interests. There was a one hundred percent response rate on the first question and a ninety one percent response rate on the second, with four respondents skipping the question.



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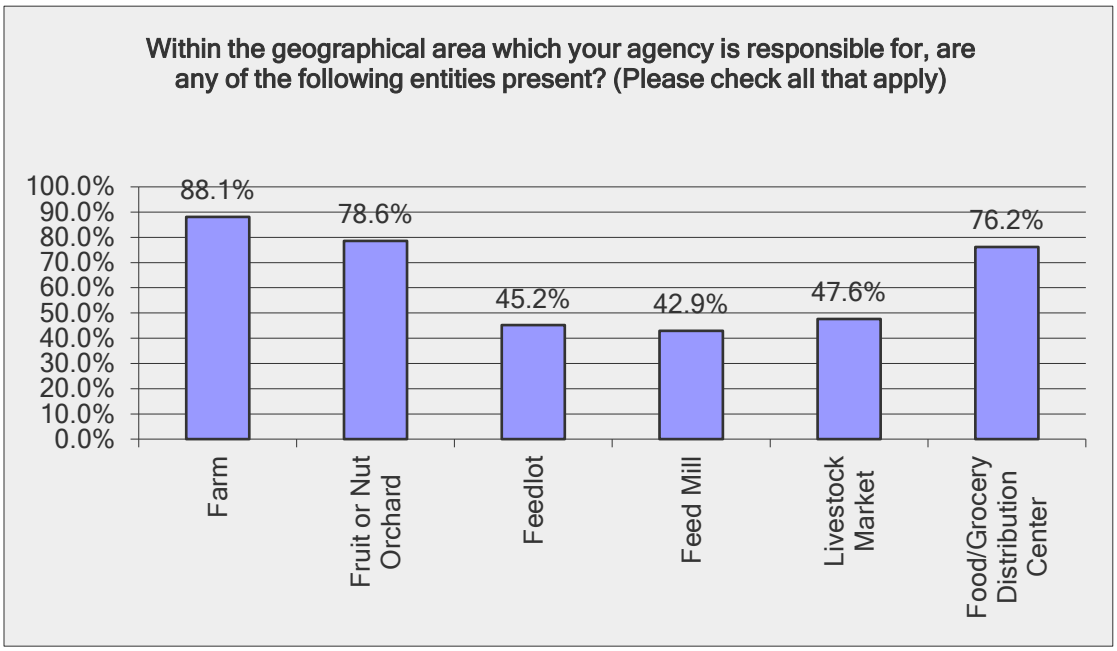

Figure 6

The next two questions queried the respondents' opinion on who should be most responsible for protecting the agricultural interests located within their agency's area of responsibility. The response rate for the first question was 98 percent and for the second, it was 93 percent.

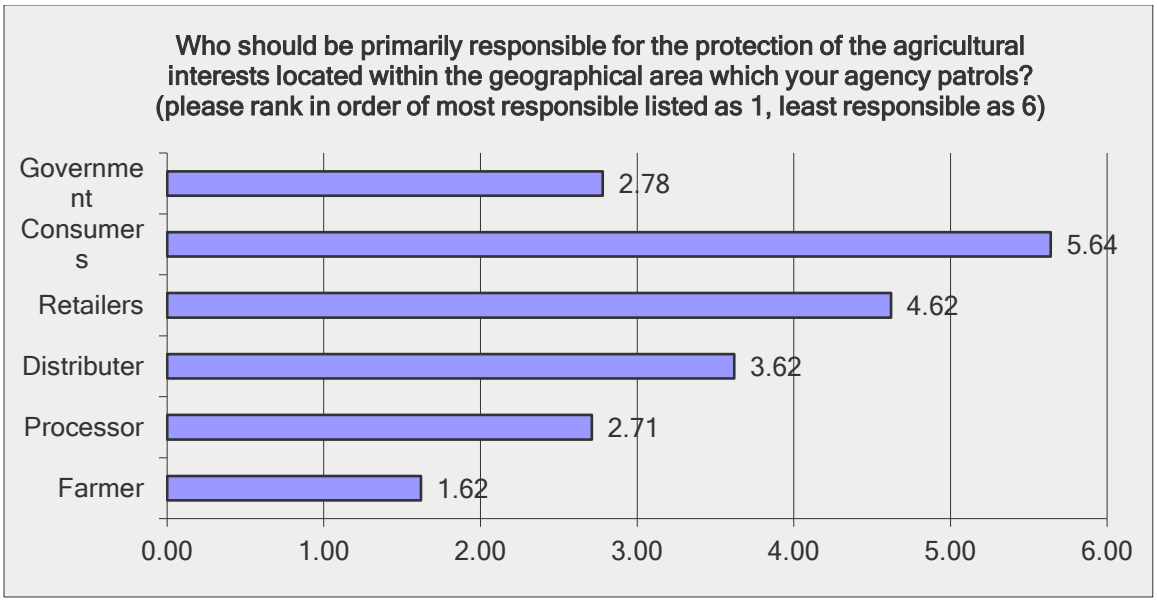

Figure 7 Rating Averages

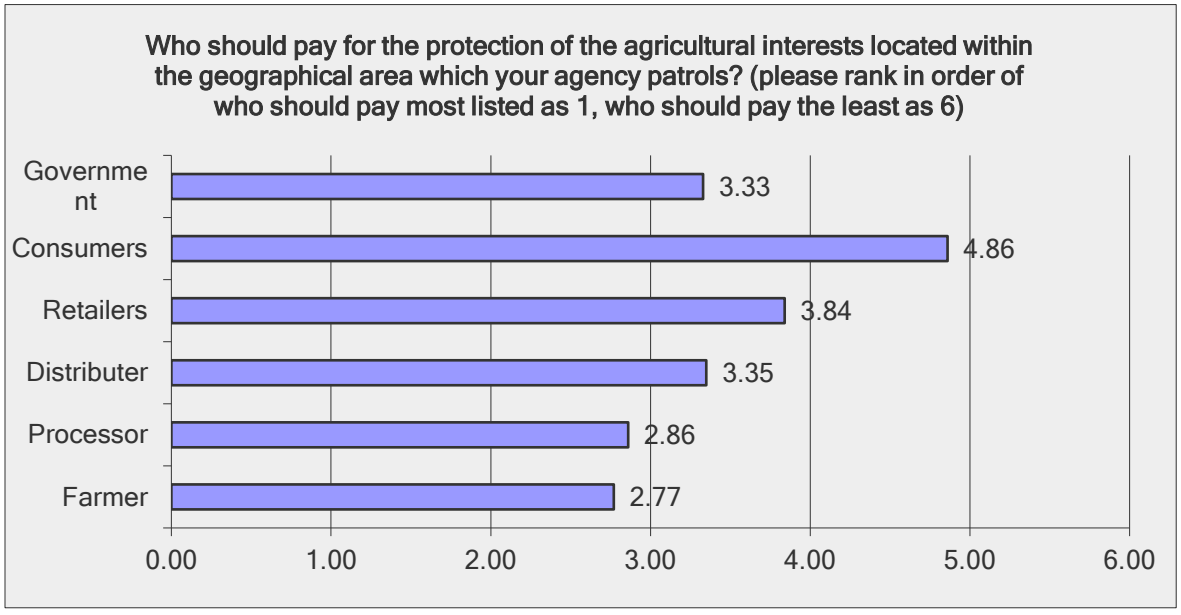

Figure 8 Rating Averages

The next two questions queried the respondents' opinion on what entities they believed would be most vulnerable to a terrorist attack and then of those same entities, where would they be most willing to spend taxpayer defense dollars to defend. There was a response rate of ninety six percent on the first question and ninety four percent on the second.

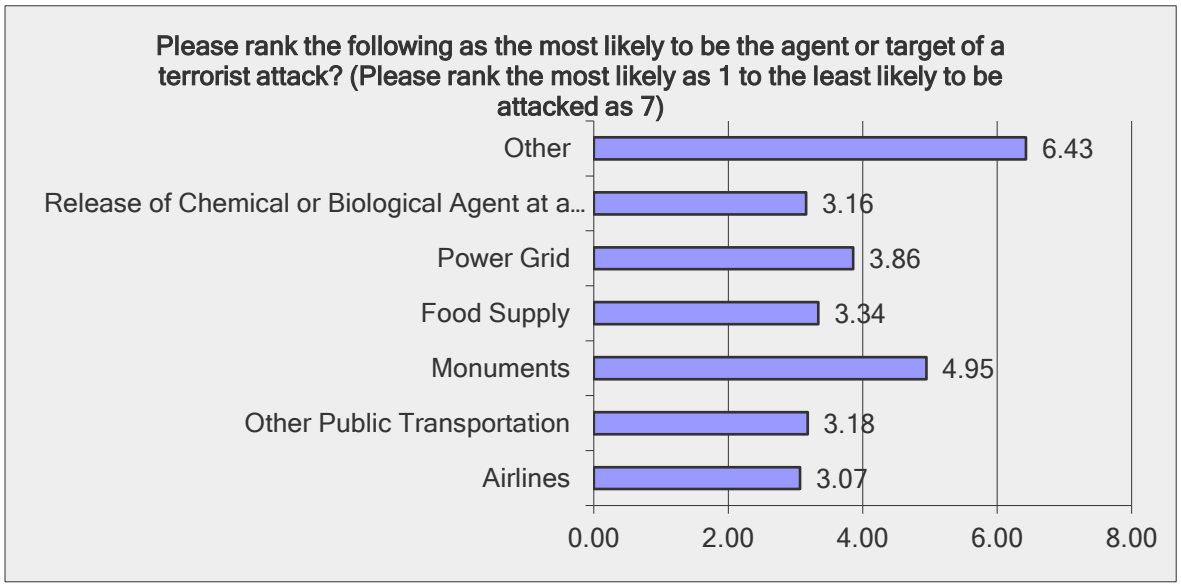

Figure 9 Rating Averages

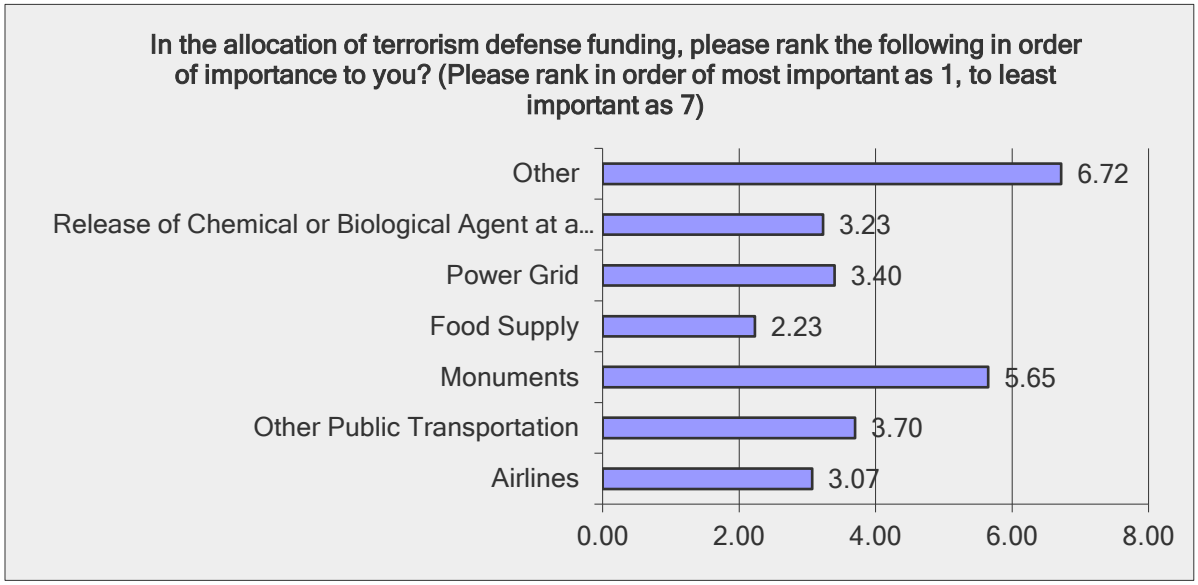

Figure 10 Rating Averages

The next questioned the respondent's knowledge of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART). There was a one hundred percent response rate on this question.

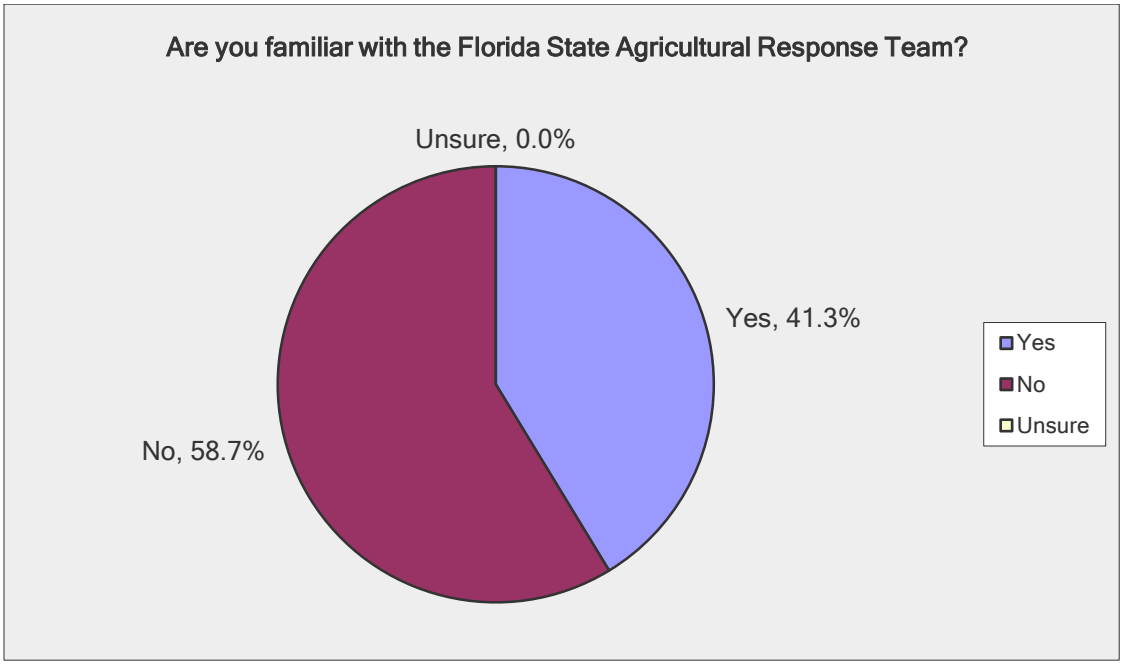

Figure 11

The last two questions in the survey, queried the respondents' opinion on how effective their agency could be to defend and mitigate a terrorist attack in their area of responsibility. There was a one hundred percent response rate on both of these questions.

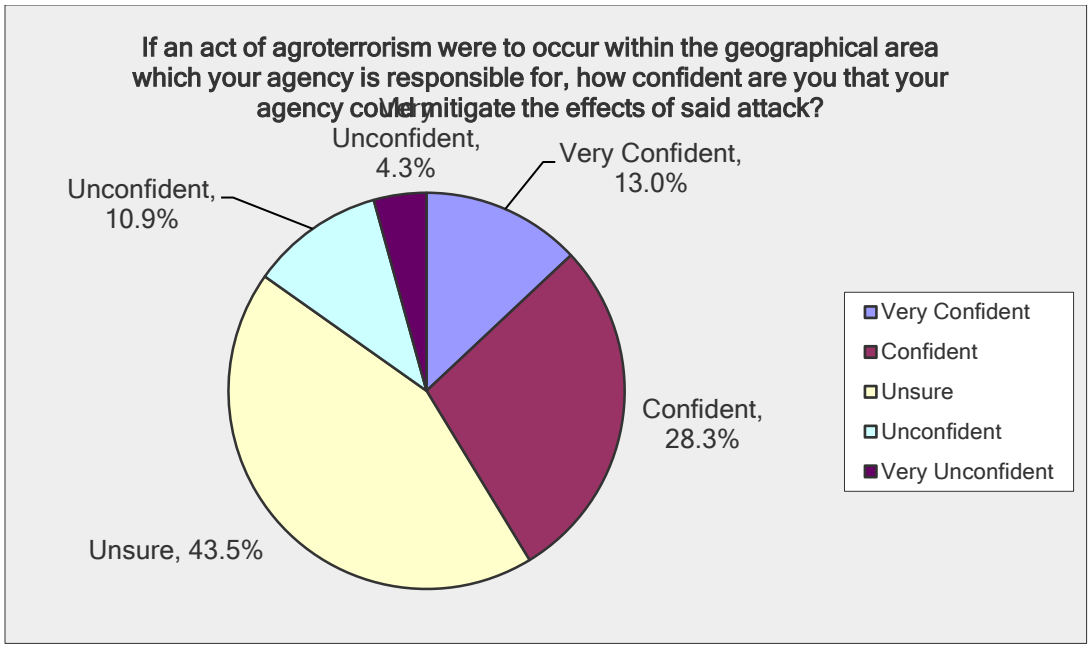

Figure 12

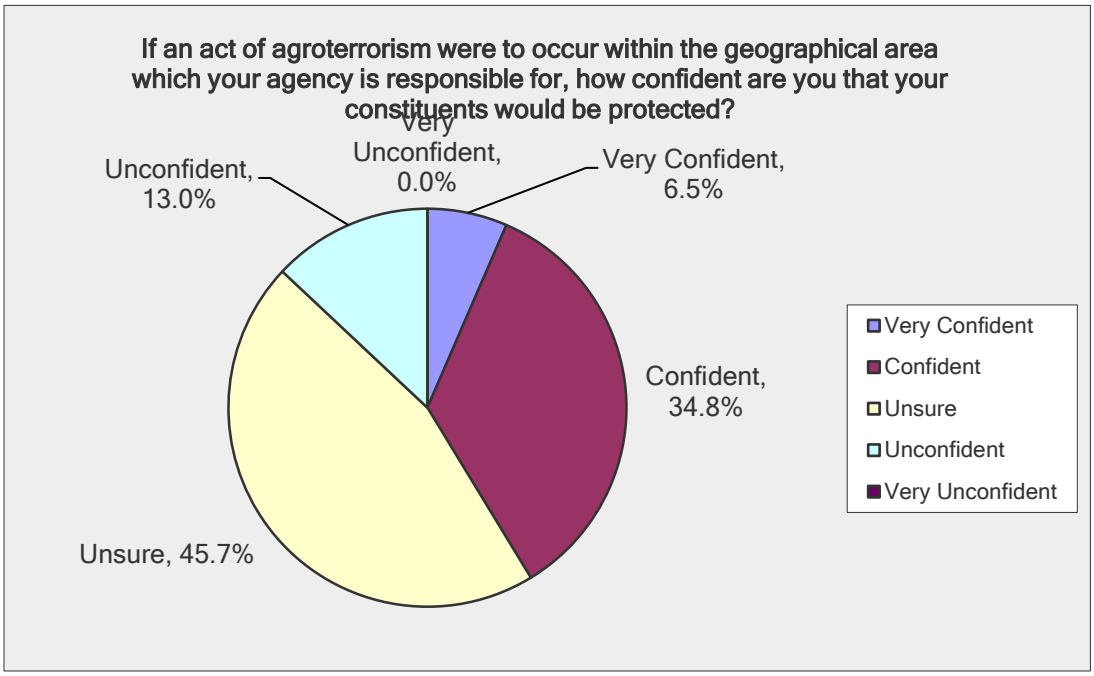

Figure 13

Discussion

Agriculture as an industry has been an integral part of Florida's economy and survival since the very beginning. This survey was meant to gauge the understanding and opinion of those most closely tasked with defending agriculture in the event of a possible terrorist attack. It is surprising to note, that nearly a quarter of those responding indicated that they had never even heard of the term Agroterrorism. However, upon further questioning, the vast majority of those responding could correctly recognize the requisite elements that made up a working definition of Agroterrorism.

As discussed in the methods section, the survey was sent out to members of Senior Leadership Program Class 16 which is comprised of state and local law enforcement, correctional officials, and the membership of the Florida Agricultural Crimes Intelligence Unit. The respondents indicated that roughly half knew their agencies to have a unit that was dedicated to Agricultural Crimes investigation, which could indicate how important Florida's agricultural industry is perceived to be to state and local law enforcement entities. In fact, over seventy one percent of respondents responded that there were agricultural interests located within their agency's area of responsibility.

As previously discussed, Stinson et al indicated that their results indicated that most respondents felt that the government was the one most responsible for the protection of agricultural interests and should be the entity most responsible for paying for that protection (p. 70). Surprisingly, the respondents to this survey felt that personal responsibility was king, indicating that the farmer should be most responsible for protecting his crops and for paying for that defense, followed by the processor, the government and then the distributer. Not surprising, the respondents felt that the consumer should be least responsible in this defense, although ultimately, through higher taxes or higher food costs, the consumer will pay.

Stinson et al, further indicated in their research that their respondents were willing to pay more to protect the food supply against a terrorist attack, even though they felt it was less likely to be the target of a possible attack (p. 68). The respondents to this survey agree. On a list of seven possible targets of terrorist attack, the food supply was ranked fourth on the list, behind airlines, the release of a chemical or biological agent, and other public transportation. However, when asked to allocate terrorism defense funding to protect the same entities, protecting the food supply was ranked number one, followed by airlines, the release of a chemical or biological agent, power grid, other public transportation, monuments and other. This clearly indicates that although we may be more afraid that the airlines may be attacked again, we want our food protected first.

Only around forty percent of the respondents queried had ever heard of the Florida State Agricultural Response Team (SART). This team is capable of responding to natural and manmade disasters to protect personal companion animals and livestock. The Florida SART's mission statement is as follows:

> SART is a multi-agency coordination group consisting of governmental and private entities dedicated to strengthening all-hazard disaster capabilities through partnerships. Florida SART will support an effective and coordinated incident response for the animal and agricultural sectors in the State of Florida (Florida SART).

Over half of the respondent's queried where either unsure or unconfident that their agency could protect against or mitigate an agroterrorist attack within their area of responsibility, whereas only about forty percent felt that they could say that they were either confident or very confident that they could.

Recommendations

Florida's agriculture industry is vitally important to the fiscal wellbeing of this state. This industry's vitality can be directly linked to consumer's confidence that our food supply is wholesome and safe. An incident of agroterrorism could erode that confidence to the point that areas of this economy could be severely devastated. Further study should be made to determine if specific vulnerabilities exist and mitigate them if possible.

Educational opportunities exist to ensure that consumers and producers alike are aware of the dangers and how to report suspicious activity in the vicinity of agricultural interests to the proper authorities. The Florida SART should ensure that state and local partners are aware of the great resource they can be to assist in the event of natural and manmade disasters.

Captain James Wiggins began his Law Enforcement Career as a patrol deputy with the Columbia County Sheriff's Office in 1995 and transitioned to the Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement in 1998. He has held several positions with OALE which have culminated to his current position as Captain. Captain Wiggins is currently the Region Three Commander of the Bureau of Uniform Services in Interstate 95 in Nassau County and is an Ensign in the United States Navy Reserves. Jim has a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice with a specialization in Forensic Science and a Master's of Science in Criminal Justice with a certificate in Public Administration from the University of West Florida.

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Appendix A

Argroterrorism: A Florida Perspective

1. Prior to being contacted about this survey, were you familiar with the term agroterrorism?
    - Yes
    - No

2. Which statement below best describes your understanding of the meaning of agroterrorism?
    - The purposeful introduction of an invasive pest or disease meant to destroy a crop
    - The purposeful introduction of a pest or disease to a feed lot meant to kill or maim livestock.
    - The purposeful introduction of a biological agent to a food project meant to harm humans
    - All of the above

3. Does your agency have a unit whose primary duty is to respond to and investigate agricultural related crimes?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure

4. If you answered yes to question 3, how many officers/deputies are assigned to this unit?
    - 1
    - 2-5
    - 6-9
    - 10 or more
    - Unsure

5. Are there agricultural interests located within the geographical area that your agency is responsible for?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure

6. Within the geographical area which your agency is responsible for, are any of the following entities present? (Please check all that apply)
    - Farm
    - Fruit or Nut Orchard
    - Feedlot
    - Feed Mill
    - Livestock Market
    - Food/Grocery Distribution Center

7. Who should be primarily responsible for the protection of the agricultural interests located within the geographical area which your agency patrols? (Please rank in order of most responsible listed as 1, least responsible as 6)
    - Farmer
    - Processor
    - Distributer
    - Retailers
    - Consumers
    - Government

8. Who should pay for the protection of the agricultural interests located within the geographical area which your agency patrols? (Please rank in order of who should pay most listed as 1, who should pay the least as 6)
    - Farmer
    - Processor
    - Distributer
    - Retailers
    - Consumers
    - Government

9. Please rank the following as the most likely to be the agent or target of a terrorist attack? (Please rank the most likely as 1 to the least likely to be attached as 7)
    - Airlines
    - Other Public Transportation
    - Monuments
    - Food Supply
    - Power Grid
    - Release of Chemical or Biological Agent to a Public Event
    - Other

10. In the allocation of terrorism defense funding, please rank the following in order of importance to you? (Please rank in order of most important as 1, to least important as 7)
    - Airlines
    - Other Public Transportation
    - Monuments
    - Food Supply
    - Power Grid
    - Release of Chemical or Biological Agent at a Public Event
    - Other

11. Are you familiar with the Florida State Agricultural Response Team?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure

12. If an act of agroterrorism were to occur within the geographical area which your agency is responsible for, how confident are you that your agency could mitigate the effects of said attack?
    - Very Confident
    - Confident
    - Unsure
    - Unconfident
    - Very Unconfident

13. If an act of agroterrorism were to occur within the geographical area which your agency is responsible for, how confident are you that your constituents would be protected?
    - Very Confident
    - Confident
    - Unsure
    - Unconfident
    - Very Unconfident