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RE: **GAO-090747 FAILS TO MEET GAO'S ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS**

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

As noted in our letter of August 4, it creates serious concern when a GAO examiner generates a misleading product that shills for some covert agenda. GAO reports typically comply with conventional auditing standards, providing balanced arguments and conclusions supported by germane data. GAO-090747 does not. The "we believe" spin throughout — undocumented with citations and lacking in facts — makes it a work of fiction at best. Having analyzed the report further, we would like to bring some additional flagrant distortions to your attention.

FABRICATED SCOPE CHANGE MADE A POSITIVE RESULT IMPOSSIBLE: DHS noted in their response to the draft report on July 6, 2009 that the focus did not reflect what GAO was charged with verifying, i.e., whether FMD research can be done safely on the mainland. Instead, the GAO examiner contrasted FMD safety on the mainland to Plum Island, then noted in the final report that this veiled comparison was "agreed to with congressional requestors" (page 47).

It's puzzling that a change in audit scope would be concealed from the agency being reviewed until the results publish. DHS was denied input. And wasn't the scope defined in P.L. 110-329?

Similarly, the report title, "Observations on DHS's Analyses Concerning Whether FMD Research Can Be Done as Safely on the Mainland as on Plum Island," implies — *illegitimately* — that DHS was mandated to analyze and prove an equivalent or better level of safety in order to select a mainland site over Plum Island. That's just not true.

This fabrication by the GAO examiner creates a clear-cut bias that made a positive outcome for DHS impossible. If a mainland site was determined to be 99.9995% safe, an additional barrier (like a mile and a half of water to Long Island) would provide an extra margin, perhaps making it 99.9998% safe. But, FMD-susceptible deer swimming to and from Plum would still be an issue.

An even greater obstacle — not studying FMD in the United States at all — would be safer yet from an accidental release standpoint, but that doesn't get the research mission accomplished. America won't be protected when the FMD virus arrives here accidentally or purposefully.

RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY IGNORED: Research efficiency was completely disregarded in the GAO report, even though scientific productivity on the mainland was a significant advantage when compared to a commuter inhospitable island site. There's a reason proximity to animal health research was the number one NBAF selection parameter; the federal government has six decades of data verifying the slow pace at which science advances on an island ... Plum Island.

DHS made the case for a mainland site in the NBAF EIS and in their response to GAO'S draft report; FMD experts at USDA concurred. The GAO examiner snubbed the research imperative.

MODELING ASSERTIONS NOT SUPPORTED SCIENTIFICALLY: In trashing the model DHS used for an accidental FMD release, the GAO examiner stated: "Modeling experts in Denmark *told us* (emphasis added) that a few models have been validated for FMD dispersion" (page 23). No proof was provided and we are skeptical of this claim.

To truly “validate” FMD dispersion to the atmosphere as alleged for the RIMPUFF model, the FMD virus would actually need to be *released to the atmosphere*. Intentionally discharging infectious disease agents into the environment for this purpose would seem foolhardy and unprecedented. Plus, as already noted, no evidence was provided to confirm this contention.

Conversely, in its July 6th response to the GAO draft report, DHS included citations to support its claims. The risk assessment approach used was based upon methodology recommendations in National Academy of Sciences committee reports from 2007 and 2008 (citations on page 6 of DHS’s 29-page response). DHS also provided a 2009 reference that “compared six different FMD atmospheric dispersion models” (page 8) to support their selection of a model for the EIS.

GAO examiners should be held to similar standards, going beyond verbal assertions by foreign scientists. That’s an even greater worry in this case where the auditor ignored peer-reviewed citations and scientific advice of U.S. subject matter experts. How is such prejudice justified?

FLAWED COMPARISON TO PIRBRIGHT: The GAO report concluded by saying: “Comparison with the Pirbright facility in the United Kingdom, where FMD outbreaks occurred from an accidental release of FMD virus, emphasizes the safety value of the island location” (page 54). The examiner failed to point out, however, that the Pirbright laboratory is actually older than the Plum Island Animal Disease Center that started operations in the early 1950s. Thus, the infrastructure has deteriorated significantly and it is severely lacking in modern biocontainment technology. NBAF will define the new 21st century standards for biosafety and biosecurity, exceeding the state-of-the-art at CDC where biocontainment has never been breached.

Of additional concern in the GAO report is a statement on page 40 about “the 2001 Pirbright outbreak in the United Kingdom.” *The 2001 FMD outbreak in Great Britain did not originate from Pirbright* and linking that British government animal health laboratory to the catastrophic losses that occurred in 2001 is inexcusable and confounding.

A small, unrelated FMD virus escape from Pirbright in 2007 was caused by a breach of an obsolete system. Even so, emergency response protocols rapidly prevailed, thereby limiting the adverse consequences.

FACTS AND DETAILS MATTER: The GAO should recognize the value of an honest, fair, and authenticated analysis. Regrettably, there are far-too-many “gaming the outcome” examples in GAO-090747 to believe they occurred by accident. Granted, GAO made no recommendations, only assertions. Nonetheless, this pattern by the GAO examiner exposes a worrisome agenda that endangers America’s scientific enterprise, food animal economy, and homeland security.

Sincerely,



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RWT/rt

cc:	Senator Sam Brownback	Governor Mark Parkinson	KSU President Kirk Schulz
	Senator Pat Roberts	Lt. Governor Troy Findley	KBA Board
	Representative Lynn Jenkins	Senator Stephen Morris	HBAC Task Force
	Representative Dennis Moore	Senator Anthony Hensley	HBAC Members
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