

Agriculture more alert since 9/11

State urges traditionally trusting farmers to be security conscious.

From staff and wire reports

Dairyman Joe Martin moved fast when he first heard that terrorists might spread chemical and biological agents through the food chain.

entrance ways of his Stanislaus County ranch and placed locks on milk tanks and cow feeders.

"I want the food source to be of quality — safe and secure," he said. "By doing these measures I can prevent someone trying to contaminate this and help ensure a safe product."

Since Sept. 11, some farms in this state have changed the way they do business — from requiring worker background checks to adding extra

lighting and security to knowing who is on the farm.

"Farms had traditionally been open places where access was easily obtained. There was a lot of trust in visitors," said Steve Lyle, spokesman for the California Department of Food and Agriculture. "Now we have urged producers to be a little more security conscious ... monitoring who is on the property and what

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SECURITY: UC Davis developing quick-response program

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they are doing there."

Rick Deckard, a grape grower in Arvin, said his farming operation is more alert for the possibility of chemicals being stolen.

But he said his business has done nothing extraordinary in response to last year's terrorist attacks.

"We haven't really seen any activity that would warrant stepping up any more than we have," he said.

Deckard's business already had — and still has — an outside security company watch over the property at night, but he said he has always done that because of fruit, chemical and tractor theft.

In other parts of California, security efforts have stepped up.

Law enforcement has been enlisted in anti-agroterrorism efforts, and the California Highway Patrol is working with the Cdfa and Health Department to monitor chemical manufacturers, distributors and crop dusters, which could be used to spread disease or chemical weapons.

Information is passed on to federal and local law enforcement through the state Anti-Terrorism Information Center, said George Vinson, Gov. Gray Davis' security adviser. Any federal, state or local warnings will be passed on to the chemical industry.

Perhaps the most immediate impact of the terrorist attacks on the state's \$27 billion agriculture industry was the grounding of planes at the start of Cali-

fornia's cotton harvest. Owners of crop dusters say they've taken precautions such as placing locks or living on the property where planes are stored.

Phil Rutledge of Rutledge Ag Air at Minter Field said he removes the keys from the planes when they're not in use, a practice that began after Sept. 11 last year.

But he adds, "it's pretty much back to business."

His employees, for example, had to report where they were flying each time they flew immediately following the attacks. But two or three months later, his planes were flying as normal, without the heavy monitoring.

Although security hasn't been a big issue for Rutledge, he watches curious onlookers at the Shafter airport more closely because of the attacks.

"If we see someone wandering around, we'll ask them what they're doing and why they're there," he said.

In the past, he would leave visitors alone.

To curtail the potential spread of biological agents, the University of California, Davis, has received a \$900,000 federal grant to create a network that would quickly identify, control and eradicate outbreaks of pests or plant diseases in several Western states. It is one of five such university programs in the nation.

UC Davis is also applying for a \$2 million grant to identify and respond to viral or chemical threats to animals. That money would enhance laboratories throughout the state and hire addi-

tional staff to combat outbreaks of devastating diseases such as foot and mouth, which forced the destruction of 4 million animals in England last year.

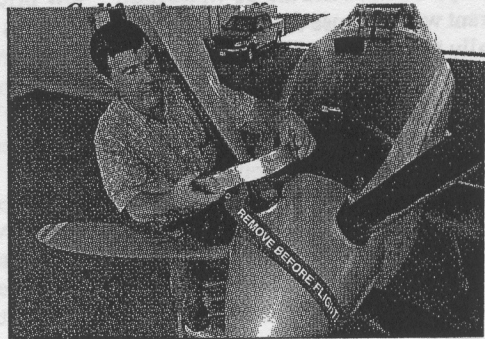
"The lesson that everyone learned from foot-and-mouth outbreak in England is that you can't depend on one central laboratory to take care of everyone's needs," said Alex Ardans, state Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory System director.

Ardans said that diseases such as foot and mouth have repercussions far beyond the immediate economic hit.

"Not only did it affect the agriculture economy, tourism suffered and there was an untold effect on social structure because there were a lot of farmers that went out of business," he said.

But while some in the agriculture industry have changed their practices, many smaller growers farm like they used to — though they are more alert to potential threats.

"Like most in the industry, we're going about our business," said Dan Sumner, UC Davis agriculture economics professor. "The changes in the large scheme of things are marginal, but everyone is being vigilant."



GARY KAZANJIAN / AP

Roger Hewett demonstrates how a counter weight is locked onto a crop duster propeller to hinder someone from flying the craft.