C.U.’s Torres to Senate: Mandatory animal identification system needed

By Roger Segelken

WASHINGTON, D.C. — If all cattle in the United States carried identification, the testing for bovine-spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or “mad cow” disease) or other animal diseases would be easier and faster, according to a Cornell animal-disease and public-policy expert.

Alfonso Torres, executive director of the New York State Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell’s College of Veterinary Medicine, made the suggestion during his testimony last week on BSE before the U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee.

He recommended “… that Congress in collaboration with the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] needs to make this national animal ID system a mandatory program.” He also described two other measures to help relieve the trade: embargoes imposed on the United States because of mad cow disease; a more equivalent and proportional trade policy, based on the degree of BSE risks with trade partners; and stepped-up enforcement of bans on the use of certain high-risk materials (such as brains, spinal cords and intestines) or other animal diseases would be a more effective way to track of herds exposed to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or other animal diseases would be easier and faster, according to a Cornell study.

Torres, associate dean of veterinary public policy, was a former chief veterinary officer of the USDA and former director of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center. Torres said during the Senate committee hearing: “While I recognize and appreciate the many efforts of the USDA and the animal industries in developing and implementing a national animal ID system, the weakness is that such a system is a voluntary effort at this time.”

The hearing to discuss food safety, live-stock marketing and international trade was called as a result of the discovery last December of a BSE-infected dairy cow in Washington state. If a universal identification system had been in place last year, Torres suggested, American and Canadian officials could more readily have traced the diseased animal and others in its herd.

Torres commended the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration for what he called effective actions following the BSE finding in December, adding: “These actions have maintained consumer confidence in our beef products. While the trade embargoes were to be expected in a situation like this, I hope that, with the implementation of further actions as suggested, we would continue to enhance the defense of our nation against BSE and sustain domestic and international confidence in our animal industries and the safety of our food and feed supply.”

The full text of the Torres testimony is at the veterinary college Web site: http://www.vet.cornell.edu/publicresources/pr-torresTestimony.htm.

Also testifying at the Senate hearing, which was held in Sen. Thad Cochran’s (R-Miss.), was USDA Secretary Ann M. Veneman and U.S. Food and Drug Administration Deputy Commissioner Lester M. Crawford.

WSKG-TV broadcasts performance Feb. 11 of CT theater’s Antigone

By Franklin Crawford

Antigone goes prime time: WSKG-TV will broadcast a full-length performance of the Cornell Department of Theatre, Film and Dance’s fall 2003 production of Sophocles’ “Antigone.” The video is, in fact, a seamless blend of two separate camera sets, each shot on a separate day, in two different locations and edited on a separate program.

The video, soon to be available on DVD as well as VHS, was taped by Education Television Center staff at Cornell Information Technologies, under the direction of Daniel Booth, television services manager. The project was edited by Peter Jones of WSKG-TV and VHS, received support from the Cornell Provost’s Office, the Department of Classics, the Society for the Humanities at Cornell, the John Cornell Institute for Writing in the Liberal Arts, and the dean’s office in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Antigone, one of the three plays written by Sophocles about the ill-fated family of Oedipus, was produced, taped and edited by Education Television Center staff in collaboration with the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] needs to make this national animal ID system a mandatory program.

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By David Brand

Two professors in the College of Engineering have received prestigious $50,000 annual awards from Lockheed Martin. They are Frank DiMeo, professor of electrical and computer engineering; and Mark Campbell, professor of the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

The two recipients are Alyssa B. Apel, the Clare Booth Luce Assistant Professor in the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Mark Campbell, assistant professor in the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, an award recipient in 2003 and 2002.

Apel is an expert on merging high-speed CMOS (complementary metal-oxide semiconductor) circuits with photonics. Her research focuses on building high-performance opto-electronic computational microsystems. She received a Lockheed Martin award for her project “Resonant Monolithic Photodetectors and On-Chip Waveguides for Integrated Optoelectronics.”

Also, Apel is the recipient of a $400,000 National Science Foundation (NSF) Early Career Award. The Faculty Early Career Development Program offers the NSF’s most prestigious award for new faculty members. The program recognizes the early career development activities of those teacher-scholar-awards who are considered most likely to become the academic leaders of the 21st century.

Apel received the NSF award for her project “Designing with Light – Comparative Analysis and Design of Optical Interconnects for Chip-to-Chip Communication.”

Apel earned her Ph.D. in electrical and computer engineering at Johns Hopkins University in 2002.

Campbell is an expert in autonomy for complex aerospace systems, such as multiple satellites and autonomous aerial vehicles. He received his Lockheed Martin award for his project “Cooperative Information Seeking for Uninhabited Vehicles.”

He earned his Ph.D. in control and estimation from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1996.