

AFRICAN SWINE FEVER FOUND IN CHINA; NEW DETECTION IN ROMANIA

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Information

Five cases of African Swine Fever (ASF) have been detected in China. Detections have included farms and a pig abattoir owned by WH Group (see map below; red are infected premises; blue is a trace premises). So far, Chinese authorities have been unable to find a link between the outbreaks. However, swill feeding is suspected in the two outbreaks near Chinese port cities.



Chinese officials are attempting to eradicate the disease, but the detections are in regions with very dense pig populations including significant backyard pig operations, which cover around 52% of the Chinese pig herd. China has been silent on whether the virus is present in its wild pig population.

The OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) indicates that China has so far screened 35.54 million pigs (circa 7% of the live pig population) and collected 10226 samples. Additional outbreaks should be expected, particularly as it is rumoured that:

- ASF could have been present in China since March/April 2018, and
- wild pigs in Mongolia may have had the virus in late 2017.

Genome sequencing indicates that the Chinese outbreak is closely related to the viruses isolated from the Russian incursions. It should be noted that the spread of ASF from Russia to western Europe to central Europe took 11 years, and with some exceptions, has mostly been detected in wild boar populations. The Chinese incursion covers a much larger distance than the Russia/Europe incursion in a relatively short timeframe and is in the domestic pig population.

As producers would be aware, if ASF becomes established in China its spread to other countries is possible. South Korea has reported seizing pork from two incoming passengers that tested positive to ASF. In addition, the detection of ASF on EU's second largest pig farm in Romania has led to the destruction of 140,000 pigs. Romanian authorities are working on the assumption that some smallholders had been dumping dead pigs into the River Danube from which the pig farm had sourced its water requirements.

APL has received several queries from producers wanting to know what the Australian Government is doing regarding biosecurity at the border and will this present an opportunity to accelerate the negotiation of protocols with China.

APL (and state CVOs) is being kept informed of developments by the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer, who is also

now the president of the OIE. APL has sought an assurance from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) that the status of Australia's pork biosecurity arrangements (Pork BIRA) remains appropriate. DAWR has confirmed that they have reviewed the Pork BIRA (as they did for PEDv incursion in USA and Canada in 2014) and are confident that these arrangements are appropriate to deal with the risk, noting that China is prohibited from exporting pork to Australia (with the exception of retorted pork, which any country is allowed to export due to cooking treatments imposed that sterilise the package contents). DAWR has also confirmed that communications with Biosecurity Australia staff at the border has occurred to ensure they are aware of incoming passengers and goods that may present risks to the Australian pork industry. DAWR is actively watching the situation and will act should any circumstances change.

The Pork BIRA provides for the specific requirements to manage the risk of an ASF incursion, which includes sourcing meat only from pigs that have been kept since birth in a country or zone free from ASF; processing the meat by canning (retorted); or processing the meat by dry curing, along with sourcing meat from premises free from ASF in an area where ASF is compulsorily notifiable. The importation into Australia of live pigs, porcine genetic material or offal is prohibited.

The virus is very stable and may survive for very long time frames in pork and pork products (including several months for raw frozen pork), natural pork sausage casings, complete feed and a range of feed ingredients (for further information regard feed risks see <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0194509>). APL has asked DAWR to review the import risks associated with such products and is providing additional information to assist with this review. ASF can also survive for several days in bodily fluids of pigs and up to a month in pig pens, with transmission likely via clothing, footwear, equipment and machinery. For further information on these risks see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5347838/>.

State CVOs are currently considering what appropriate actions could be implemented including compliance and increasing swill feeding communications, particularly around metropolitan areas.

Producers are also asking if Australia can review the importation of pig meat from the EU considering the widening of the EU incursion towards countries that currently export pork meat into Australia. To pre-emptively ban exports from EU countries currently free of ASF would risk a World Trade Organisation (WTO) court case. The EU took on Russia and won when Russia banned pork meat exports due to ASF from the entire EU in 2014 (for further information, see <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1627>). If Australia was to enact a similar pre-emptive ban, the EU would be within their rights to take Australia to the WTO – and with the Russia EU precedent, Australia would lose.

Producers have also looked at ASF in China as being an opportunity to progress protocols for pork meat exports to China. Culling to date is likely to have minimal impact on pork meat availability in China. Nor does APL view this situation as a substantial motivator for the Chinese Government to accelerate this negotiation for two reasons. Firstly, China already has agreed protocols for access from significant pork exporting nations (EU, USA and Brazil) who can more readily meet China's pork shortfall. APL is of the view that any shortfall is likely to lead to a fast-tracked agreement to reduce tariffs to the USA (and review the ban on Canada due to ractopamine) to meet this shortfall, or alternatively, that EU and Brazil will provide the shortfall with the USA backfilling their vacated markets. Secondly, the political relationship between China and Australia remains tenuous over matters unrelated to our pork import protocol request. It should be noted that some recent political movement has occurred. In summary, the negotiation of a pork protocol between Australia and China is likely to remain a work in progress for several years yet.

And finally, APL is preparing a fact sheet on ASF. Producers are urged to consider their biosecurity arrangements, including the risk of feed/feed product contamination (consider quarantine periods for these), overseas visitors and workers returning from overseas. Producers should follow generally accepted biosecurity practices (including entry controls, hygiene, visitor logs) and review those covering stock transport. APL also suggests that it is timely to undertake additional staff training regarding your biosecurity arrangements.

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