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## **Food waste threat a potential nightmare to livestock industry**

VICTORIAN food outlets are supplying pig owners with food waste, putting Australia's livestock industry at risk of contracting Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD).

A recent Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) survey of 613 regional Victorian restaurants, hotels and other food outlets found 71 of them supplied their waste to pig owners.

"That's 12 per cent of food outlets surveyed, which could mean there are hundreds of food outlets across Australia supplying their waste to pig and other livestock owners," Victorian Farmers Federation Pigs presidents John Bourke said.

"The risk is that a fair proportion of this food waste contains meat, which cannot be fed to pigs or other livestock. It's called swill and anyone feeding it to livestock faces a \$17,280 fine."

But the fine is a pittance compared to the risk swill feeding poses to Australia's pig, beef and sheep industries.

ABARES estimates an outbreak of the exotic FMD would cost the livestock industry \$52 billion.

Australia's livestock and meat exports would come to a grinding halt. Given we export 60 per cent of our livestock, the domestic market would be flooded with meat and prices would collapse.

Potentially thousands of livestock, on and around infected properties, would have to be slaughtered or vaccinated. Stock movements would be restricted and there's no doubt consumers would panic, despite assurances that the meat was safe to eat.

"It's a nightmare Australian livestock producers never want to face. But we can't afford to close our eyes to the evidence DEPI's latest survey has delivered to the industry," Mr Bourke said.

"Some would say the risk of FMD contaminated meat or dairy product entering Australia and being fed to livestock is minute.

"But the improbable came close to the possible when a consignments of frozen uncooked meat products from FMD-affected South Korea, were found on Australian retailers' shelves in 2011."

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service discovered about 3000 tonnes of illegally imported uncooked and cooked pork, chicken and beef spring rolls and dim-sims had been shipped into Australia from South Korea for at least 12 months. This at a time when South Korea had just gone through another FMD outbreak.

The South Korean imports had already been distributed to food outlets before AQIS discovered the breach.

"It would have only taken one of these outlets to supply some out of date food waste to a pig producer to create Australia's first FMD outbreak.

“Pigs are the world’s most effective incubator of the FMD virus, spreading it far and wide.

“The greatest risk Australia faces is seeing FMD spread into the feral population, where it would be virtually uncontrollable,” Mr Bourke said.

The VFF’s Pig Group is consulting DEPI on developing a campaign that highlights the risks of swill feeding, which may include:

- Incorporating a component in food service industry courses on the risk of supplying swill to pig producers.
- Encouraging stock feed suppliers to pig producers to incorporate some messaging in their products on the risks of swill feeding
- Educating free-range and back-yard pig producers on the risks of swill feeding pigs to the Australian livestock industry and penalties.

**Note: Swill** is food waste containing meat or any other mammalian products or by-products (apart from milk itself, or Australian milk product or by-products from a factory or milk processing premises licensed under the Dairy Industry Act 1992).

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