

Business Facilitation Advisory Committee
Wholesale and Retail Task Force

Government's strategy towards prevention of African Swine Fever

Purpose

This paper seeks to brief Members of the Government's preventive measures and contingency plans in response to African Swine Fever (ASF).

About African Swine Fever

2. ASF is a highly contagious disease in pigs, which is caused by ASF double-stranded DNA virus. ASF is not a zoonotic disease and will not be transmitted to human, hence posing no food safety risk. However, ASF virus demonstrates extremely high potential for transborder spread and mortality rate of pigs infected with ASF could be as high as 100%. In addition, currently there is neither vaccine nor treatment available. ASF poses a severe threat to pig rearing sector and relevant industries in any places in the world, as well as the overall live pig supply.

3. According to the information published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ASF was first detected in Kenya in Africa in 1909 and was first introduced into Portugal in Europe in 1957. Subsequently, ASF spread to a number of European countries and gradually moved eastwards into Russia in recent years. In addition, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) pointed out that ASF had caused losses of some 820 000 swine in Europe, Africa and Asia between 2016 and 2018. In August 2018, outbreak of ASF was first found on the Mainland. Over the past five months, there have been outbreaks of ASF in 23 provinces and municipalities. Thus, prevention and control of ASF is an issue requiring collaborative efforts without any delay to tackle.

4. Over 90% of live pigs consumed in Hong Kong are supplied from registered pig farms on the Mainland for supply to Hong Kong (registered farms). In 2018, there were 1.47 million live pigs imported from Mainland, averaging around 4 000 heads per day. For the sake of

prevention and control of the disease, supply of live pigs from registered farms which are infected with ASF or located within or near to the infected area will be suspended.

5. In addition, some 100 000 live pigs were supplied by the 43 local pig farms in total in 2018, averaging around 290 heads supplied to the market per day.

6. So far, there has been no ASF in any registered farms or local pig farms.

Preventive Measures

7. As ASF could cause massive infection and death in pigs within a short period of time, the Government and the trade have to take early actions, with a view to minimising the risk of ASF infection in live pigs, preventing the spread of ASF to Hong Kong and ensuring sufficient supply of live pigs for consumption by the public in Hong Kong.

8. Since the first case occurred on the Mainland, we have been closely monitoring the situation, heightening vigilance and implementing corresponding preventive measures in a timely manner. Among others, we have enhanced the biosecurity in various areas, including local pig farms, boundary checkpoints and slaughterhouses, and stepped up surveillance.

Local pig farms

9. As to local pig farms, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the pig rearing sector have implemented various preventive measures against ASF. First, AFCD requests pig farmers to implement proper biosecurity measures, including strictly controlling the access of vehicles and personnel to pig farms, enhancing cleansing and disinfection, as well as handling excrement carefully. AFCD has stepped up inspection to all pig farms to ensure that the preventive measures are properly implemented. In addition, all local pig farms have suspended the importation of breeding pigs from the Mainland since September 2018.

10. Moreover, AFCD has also amended the licence conditions for livestock keeping to ban the storage or use of swill of pork origin or in contact with pork or pork products as feed from 12 January 2019 to minimise the risk of spreading ASF virus to pigs via swill. AFCD has

arranged financial assistance and loans for pig farmers who are in need to apply for purchasing high pressure jets and equipment required for switching to use formulated feed, etc.

Imported pigs/boundary checkpoints

11. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will ensure that all live pig consignments from the Mainland are accompanied by valid health certificates and closely monitor whether any pigs in the consignments have shown suspected symptoms, with a view to timely preventing infection to other pigs.

12. FEHD and the Customs and Excise Department have stepped up cooperation to crack down on illegal importation of meat by passengers into Hong Kong. Between January and November 2018, the Government has brought 294 prosecutions and issued 125 warning letters on the cases concerned.

Slaughterhouses

13. The two local slaughterhouses located in Sheung Shui and Tsuen Wan have strengthened the cleansing and disinfection work, including the vehicles and personnel entering and leaving the slaughterhouses, the slaughter lines and lairages, to prevent the spread of ASF virus. Slaughterhouses have installed additional equipment such as pressurised water pumps and hot water high pressure jets etc., to enhance the cleansing effectiveness. FEHD and slaughterhouse operators have deployed staff to monitor the cleansing work to ensure that vehicles could leave the slaughterhouse only after they are thoroughly cleansed and disinfected.

14. The first phase of the installation works of the disinfection pool at the entrance of Sheung Shui slaughterhouse was completed on 5 January 2019. Wheels of vehicles entering and leaving the slaughterhouse could be thoroughly disinfected. Coupled with the vehicle cleansing facilities in place in the slaughterhouse, the risk of spreading ASF virus via pig-carrying trucks could be minimised. The second phase of the works has commenced on the heels of the first one, expected to be completed in early February. FEHD is liaising with the three live pig importers to explore sealing or half-sealing the pig-carrying trucks with a view to preventing leakage of pig excrement.

Surveillance and testing

15. The Government has devised the surveillance plan of ASF. AFCD and FEHD will inspect pigs in local pig farms, the live pig border control point and slaughterhouses. If there are any pigs suspected to be infected with ASF, sampled testing will be conducted.

16. A quick test could be carried out within a few hours after the samples are sent to AFCD's Veterinary Laboratory. If the initial result is positive, further confirmatory test will be conducted as soon as possible and the laboratory report could be provided within 24 hours.

17. All local and imported pigs have to undergo stringent ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections in slaughterhouses to ensure that pigs supplied to the market are fit for human consumption.

Liaison with the Mainland

18. Over the past five months, we have been maintaining close liaisons with relevant Mainland authorities on the development and response actions to keep abreast of the outbreak on the Mainland and the latest measures in place.

19. Mainland authorities have all along been exercising proper management and control at source, striving to maintain a steady supply of live pigs to Hong Kong, including the announcement of a package of measures in quarantine and control in transporting live pigs to Hong Kong. Such measures can ensure that live pigs supplied to Hong Kong undergo strict quarantine and control by the Mainland Customs authorities. Moreover, all live pigs for supply to Hong Kong have to route through Qingshuihe transfer house in Shenzhen before exporting to Hong Kong. It is understood that the relevant Mainland authorities have stepped up the cleansing, disinfection and biosecurity work of the transfer house since September 2018. If any pigs on a pig-carrying truck are found dead or showing symptoms suspected to be connected with ASF-infection when the truck arrives at the transfer house, all pigs on the truck must be returned with a view to preventing possible impacts on the transfer house.

20. We will continue to closely liaise with the relevant Mainland authorities, striving to maintain a steady supply of live pigs to Hong Kong and ensure that imported pigs are all coming from qualified registered farms which are not ASF-infected.

Publicity and Education

21. Since the first ASF case on the Mainland in August 2018, the relevant Government departments have endeavoured to promote and disseminate relevant messages about ASF via various channels and formats to general public and specific stakeholders with different needs.

22. As to stakeholders, the Government has been maintaining liaison with the local pig rearing sector and disseminating information to the trade about prevention against ASF via different channels (e.g. meetings, seminars and letters etc.) with a view to raising their awareness on disease precautions. The trade has thus enhanced the biosecurity as well as cleansing and disinfection work at local pig farms.

23. As to publicity and public education, we have disseminated the messages about prevention of ASF to public via channels like websites, announcements of public interest, radio soundtracks, social media platform etc. FEHD is posting posters at control points and disseminating information via social media to enhance promotion of the message that it is an offence to carry raw meat into Hong Kong without a health certificate. FEHD will also publicise relevant information in MTR cabinets soon. In addition, CFS has stepped up publicity to remind public to cook the pork well before consumption.

Contingency Plans

24. Implementation of a series of preventive measures mentioned above is believed to be able to help minimise the risk of spreading ASF to Hong Kong. The Government has also devised contingency plans in response to different scenarios in case of ASF outbreak in Hong Kong, especially the pig culling arrangements.

25. The Government has devised contingency plans having drawn reference from the prevention and control guidelines and experience of OIE and in various places including the European Union and on the Mainland, and also taken into account the situation of local pig rearing sector and slaughterhouse operation. The Government also seeks expert advice along the way.

Culling arrangements

26. According to the contingency plan for local pig farms, in the

event of ASF infection, all pigs in that farm will be culled, and the farm will be cleansed and disinfected thoroughly. Restocking of pigs for business resumption could only take place upon inspection to the satisfaction of veterinary surgeons. AFCD will also block and prohibit the movement of pigs of other farms within three kilometres of the infected farm, and closely monitor the situation. If any pigs in those farms were found to be infected with ASF, all pigs therein will also be culled. AFCD has devised the procedures for culling.

27. For slaughterhouses, the primary aim of conducting culling operation is to prevent virus from being carried away from slaughterhouses. Since infected pigs would have weaker immunity and may cause other hygiene problems, we will cull all those pigs. In general, infected pigs or the pigs that have been in contact with infected pigs will be culled. Other pigs in the slaughterhouse concerned will be subject to thorough examination by veterinary surgeons. Sampled testing will be conducted if necessary, such as when the pigs are suspected to be infected. The pigs will be slaughtered and supplied to the market only after they are confirmed to be not infected. The slaughterhouse concerned will be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected after clearance, and could only resume operation upon inspection to the satisfaction of veterinary surgeons.

28. Each pig culled will be compensated according to the relevant market price of its type (i.e. porkers, breeding pigs and piglets).

Way Forward

29. While the Government has implemented a suite of preventive measures in different areas, there is still risk of spreading ASF into Hong Kong. The Government will continue to closely monitor the development of outbreak and work hand in hand with different stakeholders of the trade whose staunch support is of utmost importance to take on the preventive measures, with a view to striving to maintain a steady supply of live pigs in Hong Kong.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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