African Swine Fever: A Growing Threat

African swine fever (ASF) is one of the three most concerning threats to global pig health and the pork industry. This disease is highly contagious and can have severe implications. The complex nature of the virus makes it a difficult challenge for domestic and international authorities to prevent and contain. The recent outbreaks in other countries have increased the urgency for U.S. pork producers and veterinarians to take necessary steps to prevent the deadly ASF from entering the United States.

ASF is a viral disease that is highly contagious and causes significant economic losses. Affected animals can develop fatal transmissible septicaemia, and the disease is spread primarily through contact with infected animals, personnel or contaminated materials. It is not considered a public health threat for humans. ASF can be transmitted to pigs through contamination of feed, feed additives and feed component imports, as well as through the movement of pigs and pork products.

ASF outbreaks in China and other countries have heightened the awareness and readiness of the U.S. pork industry to prevent the disease from entering the country. The pork industry has developed a list of potential actions that stakeholders can take to keep the disease from reaching U.S. pig farms. These include increasing surveillance, decreasing the number of international swine transportation movements and enhancing efforts to prevent pathogen contamination.

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The Pork Checkoff, along with its partners, have developed ASF saliva tests that can be used in bulk feed samples. This will provide a way to monitor shipments for pathogen contamination.

The USDA’s Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health’s Risk Identification Unit is monitoring diseases around the world, including China. The pork industry plans to partner with the USDA to stay ahead of any ASF threat.

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ASF cannot be transmitted to humans through contact with pigs or pork.

Members of the pig family, including domestic wild pigs, are the only animals susceptible to the ASF virus. ASF can be transmitted to pigs through feeding of uncooked garbage containing contaminated pork products. The Swine Health Protection Act regulates the feeding of food waste containing any meat products to swine, ensuring that all food waste fed to swine is properly treated to kill any disease organisms.

ASF is easily transmitted to other pigs through direct contact with infected pigs or their waste, contaminated clothing, feed, equipment and vehicles, and in some cases, by blood-sucking insects, including some tick species.

Currently, there is no vaccine that protects against ASF.

ASF: A Brief History

African swine fever (ASF), first described in the 1920s in Kenya, is a highly contagious hemorrhagic disease of wild and domestic pigs with extremely high morbidity and mortality rates. ASF is a notifiable disease with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) due to its ability to spread rapidly and cause severe illness. ASF does not pose a risk to public health. ASF is unique, as it is the only known arthropod-borne, DNA virus (coming from a microscopic, invertebrate animal with an exoskeleton such as a tick).

The disease is endemic in Sardinia (an island off of Italy), several countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and some West African countries. Spain and Portugal eradicated ASF in the 1970s, and it has also been eradicated in several following: Russia, China, New Zealand, the Caribbean, the United States, Europe, and Asia. Only in Sweden, Denmark, Poland, and Finland, the disease is not eradicated.

However, the unimpeded spread of ASF through Russia, the Caucasus, the Baltic states, and Poland is cause for concern, especially for commercial European swine production. However, the recent arrival and confirmation of ASF in China, the risk to the United States has been elevated, especially given the amount of human and cargo traffic between the two countries. In 2017, ASF has been reported in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand.

Source: USDA

FAD Resources from Pork Checkoff and Other Industry Partners

FAD Preparation Checklist for Producers
FAD Resource Packet w/Posters
(Enter inventory #04892 in the search area)
Traveling Overseas Biosecurity Fact Sheet
Hosting International Visitors on Your Farm

With the best information currently available, and until we learn more, we recommend extreme caution if considering hosting someone from an ASF-positive region of the world on U.S. farms. If you are hosting visitors, the USDA Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory on Plum Island recommends a 5-day downtime for anyone planning to have contact with susceptible species after working with foreign animal diseases and animals at the laboratory.

USDA Disease Response Strategy: African Swine Fever

African Swine Fever Fact Sheet
Secure Pork Supply Website
U.S. Pork Industry Guide to the Secure Pork Supply Plan
SHIC Global Disease Monitoring Reports

For more information:
pork.org/fad
securepork.org

Questions?
info@pork.org

Watch video: Dr. Pyburn Offers Tips on Safeguarding Your Farm from ASF