Factsheet

African Swine Fever

As part of its overall mission to protect American agriculture, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service works to keep the country's livestock and poultry healthy in two ways – first by keeping foreign animal diseases out of the country, and second by dealing with disease issues that affect our nation's herds and flocks. Together, these efforts protect American producers, their livelihoods, our food supply, and ultimately our nation's agricultural prosperity, including opportunities for international trade.

A foreign animal disease that has the potential to be devastating to U.S. swine producers is African swine fever (ASF). It is a long-standing disease found in countries around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Since August 2018, China has confirmed more than 50 cases of ASF. The disease is also spreading within the European Union, reaching 10 member states and affecting mostly the wild pig population. As the number of cases grows, USDA is increasing its vigilance and safeguarding efforts against the spread of the disease to the United States.

What is African Swine Fever?
African swine fever is a highly contagious and deadly viral disease affecting both domestic and feral (wild) pigs in all age groups. ASF is not a threat to human health and cannot be transmitted from pigs to humans.

ASF is spread by contact with infected animals' body fluids. It can be spread by ticks that feed on infected animals. People are also a source of spread; as they can move the virus on vehicles or clothing. It can also be spread by feeding pigs uncooked garbage that contains infected pork products, though there are state and federal regulations in place to ensure garbage feeding is done correctly and will not spread disease.

The signs of ASF include: high fever; decreased appetite; weakness; red, blotchy skin or skin lesions; diarrhea, vomiting, coughing and difficulty breathing. Producers or veterinarians should immediately report animals with any of these signs to state or federal animal health officials for appropriate testing and investigation. Timeliness is essential to preventing the spread of ASF.

There is no treatment or vaccine available for this disease. The only way to stop this deadly disease is to depopulate all affected or exposed swine herds.

Keeping ASF Out
Because of the concern over ASF, USDA recently reviewed and further strengthened its longstanding stringent protections against the spread of the disease.

These include:
- Collaborating with states, industry and producers to ensure everyone follows on-farm biosecurity and best practices (including for garbage feeding in states where that is allowed);
- Restricting imports of pork and pork products from affected countries; and
- Working with CBP staff at ports of entry to increase passenger and baggage screening for prohibited products from affected countries.

Preparing to Respond If Needed
Although prevention is the goal, USDA is also actively readying and planning its response, should ASF be detected. USDA has an existing emergency response plan for ASF and we update and adjust it based on current epidemiological information to ensure it remains as strong and effective as possible.

USDA is increasing the testing capacity of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network labs for ASF. This will ensure diagnostic testing occurs quickly and accurately, so that we can respond rapidly if ASF is detected. It will also support disease monitoring efforts following an outbreak, should one occur.

Because ASF spreads rapidly and can kill very quickly, fast detection is key to preventing disease spread and limiting the scope of an outbreak. It is essential that sick pigs showing potential signs of ASF are reported to state or federal animal health officials immediately for appropriate testing. Limiting an outbreak is important for many reasons, but the most important one being that is reduces the number of producers who are directly affected. Any finding of ASF will impact international trade and the swine industry, but the sooner the disease is contained and controlled, the sooner we can work together to return to business as usual.

Team Effort
Even with the USDA safeguards in place, producers, the swine industry, veterinarians and even international travelers should be vigilant in protecting against ASF.

Producers and Industry
It is essential that all producers and the swine industry ensure strict biosecurity procedures are in place and being followed on all swine farms. Good biosecurity will help protect pigs from ASF and other infectious diseases by preventing the introduction and spread of viruses or other germs throughout pig populations.

Each farm should have a biosecurity manager, who is responsible for educating workers and all onsite personnel about the site-specific biosecurity plans or protocols for that farm. Biosecurity should be routinely evaluated to make sure the plans are working and that the steps are completed correctly, every day - every time.

Producers should also maintain strict records of visitor traffic including personnel, vehicles and equipment on farms and all pig production facilities.

For more information on swine biosecurity, contact your swine industry associations, who have a wide variety of materials available.

Veterinarians
ASF is a notifiable disease in the United States. Veterinarians should be familiar with the signs of ASF (listed above) and report any potential cases to state or federal animal health officials right away.

International Travelers
International travelers also need to be aware of this disease, as they could unknowingly carry the virus into the United States.

Anyone who has contact with pigs or swine farms on travel must ensure they carefully clean and disinfect their shoes, wash their clothes and shower prior to having contact with pigs here in the U.S. Report the visit on the CBP form (question 12).

Travelers looking to bring back agricultural items or souvenirs should check USDA's travelers web page to see if the item(s) are allowed.