

Weekly Overview: Support to Fight African Swine Fever in EU, China

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GLOBAL - African swine fever (ASF) has been much in the news in the last week as the EU has pledged financial support towards the disease control costs within the area. Germany is stepping up its efforts to keep the infection out of the country by involving hobby farmers and pet pig owners as well as commercial producers and wild boar hunters. FAO has set up its first ASF control project in China.

African swine fever is a serious pig disease with severe economic consequences. It was first detected in the European Union in Lithuania at the beginning of 2014. Despite the stringent veterinary and sanitary measures adopted to control it, the disease has spread further to Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, causing heavy losses for farmers and operators involved in trade in pigs and pig products.

The disease seems to have been introduced into these EU states from the Russian Federation and possibly Belarus, where it has been present for several years, and where the relevant sanitary authorities have been unable to eradicate it or prevent its further spread.

At its regular meeting in Luxembourg last week, the EU Agriculture Council held an exchange of views on the ASF situation in the European Union.

Several ministers highlighted the risk of a further spread of the disease in the region and supported the member states directly affected. That support will take the form of coordination of veterinary and sanitary measures to eradicate and prevent the spread of ASF to other countries as yet unaffected by the disease and ensuring that the costs incurred in doing so are covered by the EU and that there is compensation for pigs, feed, medicines, disinfection etc. in case of an outbreak.

The Commission confirmed that the conditions have been met for the EU to contribute at a rate of 75 per cent to the veterinary measures in the member states directly affected by the disease, and showed openness on additional new measures.

Germany is stepping up measures to keep out ASF. Hobby farmers and pet pig owners are being urged to play their part in keeping the disease out of the country and a politician has called for research to be stepped up to control ASF.

Government efforts so far have been focused on warning visitors and travellers not to dispose carelessly of food items from countries affected by the disease.

In the last week, new outbreaks or signs of ASF have been reported in Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. ASF is not only a concern in Europe, of course. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has set up its first project to deal specifically with the threat of an incursion of the disease – in China.

The main aims of this project are to improve the overall national level of preparedness for ASF through capacity-building activities on risk assessment, diagnostic capacity and epidemiology and awareness campaigns for farmers and veterinarians. or now, government efforts are focused on warning visitors and travellers not to dispose carelessly of food items from countries affected by the disease.

On other news in the last week, global pork markets are showing signs of cooling down, according to Rabobank's latest report on the sector.

According to the report, the peak of the 2014 porcine epidemic diarrhoea virus (PEDv) outbreak is past but the global pork industry faces another challenge from the Russian import ban affecting EU, US, and Canadian markets, which is resulting in a rapidly changing trade landscape.

Beneficiaries of the ban include Brazil, which has seen a 30 per cent per kilo price rise, while the EU has seen prices drop by nine per cent with no sign of recovery. Even taking into account the positive impact of declining feed costs on margins, it will be a disappointing year for the EU pork industry, forecasts Rabobank.