

Government officers met trade representatives on contingency plans for African Swine Fever

The Government officers today (December 28) met local pig farmers and stakeholders related to supply chain of live pigs on preventive measures and contingency plans to guard against the spreading of African Swine Fever (ASF) to Hong Kong, culling arrangements under different scenarios as well as the Government's assistance to the trade and compensation for culling of pigs.

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) briefed local pig farmers this afternoon at the Tai Lung Experimental Station on the Government's plans. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) also met representatives of the trade and the relevant stakeholders, including slaughterhouse operators, livestock agents, buyers and meat transportation companies, in the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse this afternoon to explain to them the related arrangements.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) said, "Today's meetings effectively allowed all the parties to exchange views on the contingency plans so as to get well prepared for prevention of ASF. We welcome local pig farmers' support for the contingency plans including the culling arrangements, and their continued co-operation with the Government closely on taking preventive measures."

"ASF is not a zoonotic disease and will not be transmitted to human, hence posing no food safety risk. Well-cooked pork and pork products are safe for consumption. As ASF could cause massive infection and death in pigs within a short period of time, the relevant Government departments have been closely monitoring the latest developments of ASF, heightening vigilance and implementing the corresponding measures since the first ASF case occurred on the Mainland in August this year.

"The Government has made reference to the prevention and control guidelines and experience of the World Organisation for Animal Health and in various places including the European Union and on the Mainland, and also taken into account the situation of local pig rearing industry and slaughterhouse operation when strengthening the preventive measures and devising contingency plans. The Government also seeks expert advice from time to time along the way. The Government has been maintaining liaison with the local pig rearing sector and gradually implementing various preventive measures, such as deepening the trade's understanding of ASF as well as enhancing cleansing and disinfection in different areas of live pig supply, in a bid to protect the local pig rearing industry and prevent ASF from spreading into local pig farms. All imported and local pigs have to undergo ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections in slaughterhouses to ensure that pigs supplied to the market are fit for human consumption.

"The Mainland authorities exercise stringent inspection and quarantine on live pigs for supply to Hong Kong. So far, there has been no ASF in any registered pig farms supplying Hong Kong (registered farm). If a registered farm were to be infected with ASF or located within or near to the ASF infected area, its supply of live pigs would be suspended. We will continue to closely liaise with the relevant Mainland authorities to strive to maintain steady supply of live pigs to Hong Kong," the spokesman added.

FEHD also releases on its website daily information on the quantity and auction price of live pigs supplied and the estimated number of live pigs to be supplied on the following day, which has helped enhance the transparency and effective operation of the market. Website:
www.fehd.gov.hk/english/sh/index.html

Culling arrangements

According to the contingency plan for local pig farms, in the event to 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 pig in those farms were found to be infected with ASF, all pigs therein will also be culled. AFCD has devised the procedures for culling in a humane manner.

Incubation period of ASF is at least four days, i.e. 96 hours. ASF virus may be found in slaughterhouses in three scenarios. First, live pigs have been supplied to a slaughterhouse by a local pig farm or a registered farm within 96 hours prior to the identification of ASF in that farm. Second, a consignment of pigs from a local pig farm or a registered farm on the way to a slaughterhouse is found to be infected, but those pigs have yet to come into contact with other pigs in the slaughterhouse. Third, a pig in the lairage in a slaughterhouse is found to be infected.

In the first scenario, if pigs have been supplied to a slaughterhouse by an infected farm within 96 hours prior to the identification of ASF, all pigs from that farm remaining in the slaughterhouse will be culled. Other pigs in the slaughterhouse 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.

In the second scenario, the whole consignment of pigs will be culled. As for other pigs, thorough examination will be conducted by the veterinary surgeons, and 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.

In the third scenario, all pigs in the slaughterhouse will be culled. The slaughterhouse will be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected after clearance. As the infected pig may come from either a local farm or a registered farm, or may be infected after entering the slaughterhouse, AFCD will block the movement of pigs of those local farms which have supplied pigs to the slaughterhouse within 96 hours prior to the identification of ASF and carry out an in-depth investigation, until it can rule out the possibility that the local farms concerned are infected. As for the registered farms which have supplied pigs to the slaughterhouse within 96 hours prior to the identification of ASF, the Centre for Food Safety of FEHD will notify the Mainland authorities concerned.

Enhanced preventive measures

As to local pig farms, AFCD implements various preventive measures against ASF, including disseminating information to the trade and pig farmers about prevention against ASF via different channels (e.g. seminars, letters etc.) with a view to raising their awareness on disease precautions. AFCD requests pig farmers to implement proper biosecurity measures, strictly control the access of vehicles and personnel to pig farms, enhance cleansing and disinfection of vehicles and personnel entering and leaving pig farms and carefully handle excrement.

Apart from stepping up inspection to all pig farms, 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 January 12, 2019. Pig farmers could apply for financial assistance and loan from AFCD if necessary to purchase facilities for strengthening biosecurity, such as high pressure jets and equipment required for switching to use formulated feed, etc. In addition, the importation of breeding pigs from the Mainland has also been suspended since September this year.

Currently, the local slaughterhouses adopt stringent bio-security measures, including cleansing and disinfection of the slaughterhouses and vehicles entering and leaving the slaughterhouses so as to prevent spreading of ASF virus inside the slaughterhouses or to local pig farms via vehicles. Since live pigs usually will not be kept in the slaughterhouse for more than two days before they are slaughtered while the incubation period of ASF virus is at least 96 hours, the chance of cross infection among pigs is very slim.

Moreover, according to the Imported Game, Meat, Poultry and Eggs Regulations under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132), it is an offence to import meat into Hong Kong without a health certificate issued by an issuing entity from the place of origin or prior written permission from FEHD. Offenders are liable on conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment.

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 this year, the Government has brought 294 prosecutions and issued 125 warning letters on the cases concerned. Moreover, FEHD has enhanced publicity by posting posters at control points and

disseminating information via social media to promote the message that it is an offence to carry raw meat into Hong Kong without a health certificate.

Information about ASF

More information about ASF is available at the websites of the Food and Health Bureau, AFCD and FEHD for access by the public.