

LCQ20: Incidents of pigs in slaughterhouses infected with infectious diseases

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

Immediately upon confirming on the afternoon of the 10th of this month that African Swine Fever (ASF) virus had been found in a pig sample from Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) announced that all pigs in SSSH would be culled. In addition, the operation of SSSH was suspended for more than one week for thorough cleansing and disinfection. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that ASF is transmitted only among pigs and does not infect humans, nor does it pose a food safety risk, of the measures the Government took in the past and will take in future to publicise this message among members of the public, so as to maintain public confidence in pork consumption;
- (2) whether it will, after duly consulting stakeholders, establish a compensation mechanism in respect of such kind of incidents; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it has studied how the process of cleansing and disinfection of SSSH can be expedited in future, with a view to shortening its closure period as far as practicable; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it has summed up the experience gained from this incident for formulating a standard practice for handling similar incidents in future; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

(1) Since the first African Swine Fever (ASF) case occurred on the Mainland in August 2018, the relevant government departments have been widely disseminating information to the public and stakeholders about the prevention of ASF, including the messages that ASF will not be transmitted to humans and well-cooked pork is safe for consumption, through different means and channels such as government websites, announcements in the public interest, radio soundtracks, and social media platforms etc. The Food and Environmental

Hygiene Department (FEHD) has also enhanced publicity by putting up posters in MTR train compartments and at various control points, as well as 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.

(2) Under the existing mechanism, each pig culled will be compensated by the Government according to the market price of its type. We will liaise with the trade on the details of the compensation arrangement.

(3) and (4) The Government declared the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH) as an infected place after a pig sample collected therein was tested positive for ASF virus on May 10, 2019 and carried out thorough cleansing and disinfection after culling all the pigs kept therein to prevent the virus from spreading beyond the SSSH. This is the general international practice in handling ASF infected places.

The cleansing and disinfection work carried out at the SSSH was conducted after clearance and completed smoothly on May 18 with the concerted efforts of the slaughterhouse operator and relevant stakeholders. In the light of this experience, FEHD will continue maintaining dialogue with the trade to fine-tune the process in the future with a view to shortening the closure period of the slaughterhouse as far as practicable.

In addition, we will review the existing preventive measures and contingency plans for controlling ASF, and identify any areas for improvement in future, in view of this incident.