

OIE activities to protect pig welfare in the frame of African swine fever control measures

Summary

The spread of African swine fever is a global concern causing large-scale mortality in pig populations and impacting livelihood and food supply for many. Infected countries aim to contain and control outbreaks as quickly as possible when they happen. Since there is no effective treatment or vaccine, the main measures include strict quarantine and biosecurity, movement restriction and the humane culling of animals. These measures can be extremely challenging to implement where there are large populations and high density of susceptible pigs and complex value chains with a range of different types of production systems from small backyard subsistence farms to large-scale intensive farms.

The OIE develops international standards on animal health and welfare and is committed to supporting its 182 members.

Epidemiology of ASF

Throughout this past year, the rapid spread of [African swine fever](#) (ASF) across Asia, Africa and Europe has been causing concern for Veterinary Services and the different actors of the pig value chain across the world, whether they are in an affected region or not. This viral disease, that affects wild and domestic pigs, is causing large-scale mortality in pig populations, dramatically impacting the livelihoods of pig farmers.

Considering the impact of ASF and the absence of an effective vaccine and treatment, countries that have detected one or more outbreaks of the disease in their territory must implement appropriate disease control measures as quickly as possible to contain the spread of the disease. These measures include culling animals, which must be done in a humane way. However, implementation is challenging in areas with large populations and high density of susceptible pigs, where there are outbreaks, many animals may be involved and need to be culled. This is currently the case in Asia, where more than 9 000 outbreaks¹ have been reported since 2018 to the OIE by national authorities. In addition, the level of preparedness and readiness varies greatly across and within regions where production systems can range from small backyard subsistence farms to larger-scale intensive farms. Despite communication efforts, many farmers, traders, and pig handlers have limited resources and little knowledge of this disease, its specific epidemiology and, particularly, of animal welfare. Unfortunately, in these situations, culling practices do not always meet the animal welfare standards, generating concerns worldwide and, particularly, at the level of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

OIE international standards and animal welfare

Improving animal health and welfare is part of the OIE mandate. To achieve this, the OIE develops international Standards through a responsive, science-based and transparent process². These Standards are published in the [OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code](#), after being adopted by its 182 Member Countries.

A full [section](#) contains standards on animal welfare and more specifically, [chapter 7.6](#) contains standards on the killing of animals for disease control purposes. This chapter provides recommendations to ensure the welfare of animal once a decision to cull has been made. A specific chapter on [Animal Welfare and Pig Production Systems](#) was adopted in 2018 by OIE Members to

¹ Situational update of ASF in Asia and the Pacific dated on December 5, 2019. World Animal Health Information System (OIE-WAHIS).

² Learn more about the [OIE standard-setting process](#).

complement the broad range of standards relating to the welfare of terrestrial animals. This chapter contains a dedicated section for humane killing of pigs and applies to all commercial systems for the production and sale of pigs or pig meat. By becoming Members of the OIE, countries commit to implement these standards and incorporating them into their national legislation in order to protect animal health and welfare, including swine populations in this particular context.

To better support national Veterinary Services in the implementation of OIE international Standards on animal welfare, several actions are being taken by the Organisation and governed by its [Global Animal Welfare Strategy](#) (GAWS). Adopted in 2017 by OIE Members, this strategy seeks to achieve a world where the welfare of animals is respected, promoted and advanced in ways that complement the pursuit of animal health, human well-being, socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

Regional Animal Welfare Strategy (RAWS)

Anticipating this strategy, a [Regional Animal Welfare Strategy](#) (RAWS) for Asia, the Far East and Oceania was developed in 2008 to help support the implementation of OIE Standards and improve knowledge and understanding of animal welfare in a region comprising more than half the world population of people and animals.

Over the past months, regional meetings and trainings were conducted in this region to raise awareness and build capacities to control ASF and other pig diseases. More specifically, a Regional Workshop for OIE National Focal Points for Animal Welfare was organised in November 2019 in Indonesia, with the aim of updating the National Focal Points on the latest developments of the OIE in the area of animal welfare and to re-assess the agreed priorities of the current RAWS. Participants coming from 28 regional countries actively discussed the challenges and opportunities of the implementation of OIE Standards, and notably included ones related to the killing for disease control purposes.

Regional activities to support ASF control

Lastly, through the [Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases](#) (GFTADs), the OIE and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have been working extensively in Asia to enhance regional cooperation and information sharing that could help reduce the impact of this deadly pig disease. To foster this cooperation, in April 2019, a Standing Group of Experts on ASF was created to help to build capacities for fighting the disease. Using the GFTADs mechanism, a [global initiative for the control of ASF](#) is currently being developed following the request of OIE Members at the 87th OIE General Session. This initiative will contribute to strengthen countries' prevention and preparation efforts while minimising the adverse impacts on animal health and welfare.

Moreover, the OIE Sub-Regional Representation for South East Asia has been developing a [series of webinars on ASF-related topics](#) to provide updated scientific information and share experiences. These webinars target a large audience, including key staff from Veterinary Services or pig industry which would not be able to physically attend workshops during this crisis period. Recognised experts in the topics participate in the webinars. The 10th webinar focused on the topic of pig welfare: the recorded video and the presentations are available [here](#).

Conclusion

The current situation is clearly challenging for Asian territories, considering the large numbers and high density of pig production in the region, the great diversity of production systems, and their different capacities to respond to the threat. These characteristics lead to major difficulties and challenges for

the national authorities to apply control measures and improve biosecurity practices. The OIE is in constant communication with national authorities in order to provide technical support to its Members, upon request.

Considering the impact of ASF and the recent upsurge in the spread of the disease, the OIE encourages its members to implement international Standards to protect pig health and welfare.

For more information:

- [OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code](#)
 - [Chapter 7.6. Killing of animals for disease control purposes](#)
 - [Chapter 7.13. Animal welfare and pig production systems](#)
 - [Chapter 15.1. Infection with African swine fever virus](#)
- [OIE Global Animal Welfare Strategy](#)
- [OIE ASF web page](#)
- [OIE awareness campaign 'ASF kills pigs'](#)
- [Latest OIE Global Situation Reports on ASF](#)
- [ASF-related webinars](#)