

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: African Swine Fever Update

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Post: Sofia

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Report Highlights:

As of early December 2019, Bulgaria reported 41 African swine fever (ASF) cases in domestic hogs and 134 cases in wild boars. The last detection in domestic pigs was reported on October 23. Currently, ASF is present in all regions of the country and detections in wild boars continue. Bio-safety, especially on small-holder farms, along with new policies for hunting, are the main focuses of Bulgarian veterinary authorities. Funding shortfalls for laboratory diagnostics and insufficient staffing of field veterinary professionals remain as key challenges.

Overview

ASF was first confirmed by Government of Bulgaria (GOB) authorities on July 3, 2019, in domestic pigs. As of December 5, [41 cases](#) have been confirmed in domestic pigs, including seven on industrial farms, all in the July 19 to August 16 timeframe, with total affected pigs over 133,000. The last outbreak in domestic pigs was reported on October 23 in the region of Bourgas in southern Bulgaria. 32 cases were reported on backyard farms and two on small family farms. 134 cases in wild boars have also been confirmed, including eight cases on December 2, 2019. ASF is currently present throughout Bulgaria.

To date, the reported number of culled animals is over 140,000. This accounts for 21 percent of the national swine inventory. There are no official data reflecting backyards pigs voluntarily culled during the summer under ASF mitigation efforts, although unofficial estimates range from 1,000 to 10,000 pigs, with some unofficial estimates even approaching 50,000 pigs. ASF also threatened to wipe out a local black swine breed (East Balkan breed) which is traditionally raised free (similar to Black Iberian breed). Reportedly, 420 Black East Balkan pigs were infected by ASF, out of 2,000 total pigs of this breed.

According to the GOB, ASF-related losses are at upwards of €25 million. In early December, the GOB allocated 3.7 million leva (€1.9 million) for further ASF containment and prevention. The funds are to be used for more stringent border control, mandatory biosecurity measures at small farms, disinfection, stricter epizootic control and depopulation of wild boars.

Authorities' Response to ASF Outbreak

In their efforts to contain ASF, local authorities were forced to make difficult political decisions related to backyard farms and hunting. Despite economic and political challenges, as of December 2019, the GOB reported that Bulgaria's animal health situation has significantly improved. A minister-level ASF conference is scheduled on December 18-19 to discuss lessons learned and plans for activities in 2020. At the same time, employees of the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) protested on December 4 demanding an agency budget increase and higher salaries. BFSA employees claim that pay discrepancies between public sector and private veterinarians result in a perpetual labor deficit, and a lack of funding also results in consistent lack of laboratory supplies and slow disease testing.

Backyard Farms and Biosecurity

At the end of July, the Minister of Agriculture issued an [ordinance](#) to protect industrial hog production facilities. The ordinance introduced 20 km buffer zones around all commercial swine operations in 23 of the 28 provinces and called for voluntary slaughter of pigs from backyard farms (i.e. those without adequate biosecurity measures) located within the buffer zones, regardless of whether or not the ASF virus was detected on the farm. The authorities encouraged backyard farmers to slaughter their animals as soon as possible to prevent potential future contamination. There was criticism toward the

GOB's policy that the 20 km buffer zones were excessive, beyond EU requirements, and lumped farms together by size or category and not by individual biosecurity measures.

Traditional backyard farms typically lack good biosecurity measures and produce pork for subsistence. Although smallholders can legally raise no more than five pigs and are not allowed to breed their sows, some of these farms were discovered to have upwards of 200 pigs which were not legally registered. These farms were identified as the highest risk for ASF. Farmers were compensated by €150 for disinfection of their farms but not for the voluntarily slaughtered pigs in case the animals were not registered.

The government's ordinance was met with protests and even riots in rural areas, including road blockades. Nevertheless, the joint efforts of the veterinary, police, and local authorities resulted in successful enforcement of this policy.

As of early December, the GOB reported that its efforts were efficient since there have not been any new outbreaks in domestic pigs for a month and a half. Since September, Bulgarian authorities shifted their focus to changing relevant legislation on small-holder biosecurity and providing financial support to these farms to incentivize new stricter and biosecurity standards.

The major [Veterinary Medical Act](#), which is still in draft under a public comment period, seeks to implement regulations (Ordinance 44) regarding on-farm pig limits. According to the new regulations, up to three pigs will be allowed on small subsistence farms for personal consumption. Up to 200 pigs will be allowed on small family farms for fattening and commercial sale. Subsistence farms can be repopulated only after BFSAs inspection and animal registration. In ASF-affected regions where smallholders voluntarily slaughtered their pigs, no replacement pigs are allowed for one year after the outbreak. Also, any new commercial pig operations are required to be at least 10 kilometers any other from established farms.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) is allocating funds under the Rural Development Program for small holders to implement biosecurity measures and become compliant with the new regulations. Additional new funds are planned for incinerators to be used on commercial farms. Finally, farmers raising East Balkan breed pigs are eligible for *de minimis* funds of up to 75 leva (€38)/head and up to 25,000 €/farm for the period of 2017-2019. As of the end of October, the GOB paid €4.9 million to 32,000 backyard farms for disinfection (€150/farm).

Hunting and Wild Boars: Depopulating wild boars remains a high priority for the GOB due to overpopulation in recent years and new ASF detections. Currently, MinAg plans to depopulate 82,000 wild pigs (as of November 12, 13,900 have been shot). Samples from wild boars are being processed faster and results are available within a week versus two weeks. Laboratory tests to date show that one of every 185 wild boars is ASF positive. From the start of the hunting season on October 5 to November 3, about 8,200 tests were conducted on wild boars and 44 tested positive. Currently, three BFSAs labs in Sofia, Veliko Turnovo, and Stara Zagora are accredited to test for ASF. The boar hunting period is scheduled to be extended.

Economic and Trade Impact

Bulgaria has over 60 industrial swine complexes which account for 93 percent of the total national swine herd. Following a jump in hog stocks and pork production in 2018, the industry incurred substantial losses after the summer 2019 ASF outbreak. The latest [official data](#) for slaughter (excluding backyard farms) for January-August 2019 shows a 22-percent increase in slaughter, but only a 6.7-percent increase in pork production, mainly because farms had to slaughter animals at lower carcass weight. Similarly, many small holders had to slaughter underweight pigs. Post expects that the drastic reduction in hog stocks on commercial and small farms will begin to affect pork supplies soon. Pork prices started to creep upward as of early November, as more expensive imported pork began to come into Bulgaria to compensate for lower local supplies. Official [data](#) as of November 11 indicates that the average price of class E pork was €203.06/100 kilograms, 8.2 percent above the EU weighted average (€187.62/100 kg). This was 15.7 percent above November 2018 prices, and 1.5 percent above mid-October prices.

Pork consumption per capita continues to trend upward. In 2018, pork [consumption](#) averaged 10.5 kg/capita, 12 percent higher than 2017. [Early data](#) for the third quarter of 2019 vis-à-vis the corresponding period in 2018 shows a growth of 3.7 percent. This trend, along with the expected drop in local pork supplies, is expected to drive higher imports in 2020. Conversely, domestic pork producers are benefitting from higher prices. The commercial farms first hit by ASF are already beginning to repopulate their stocks. Still, some experts have publicly stated that Bulgaria may need at least three years to fully repopulate its commercial hog farms.

Attachments:

No Attachments.