

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Bulgaria Makes Progress Recovering from ASF

Country: Bulgaria

Post: Sofia

Report Category: Livestock and Products, Pest/Disease Occurrences

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Report Highlights:

In late April, the Government of Bulgaria (GOB) informed that most large commercial hog farms were once again eligible to ship pork meat to other European Union (EU) markets. The announcement followed the European Commission's (EC) decision to lift Bulgarian African swine fever (ASF) restrictions for live swine and pork from 20 municipalities in 14 regions. Persistent industry efforts to recover from ASF resulted in significant growth in Bulgaria's hog inventory in early 2021.

Overview

The EC's decision to remove of ASF-related trade restrictions for most Bulgarian live swine and pork was long-awaited by the pork Bulgarian industry. The EC liberalized the restrictions gradually. In March, five regions (Razgrad, Dobrich, Kurdzali, Blagoevgrad, and Sofia) out of total 28, regained eligibility to export pork to other EU Member States. In April, nine more regions were added (Silistra, Rousse, Veliko Turnovo, Pleven, Turgovishte, Shoumen, Sliven, Vidin, Varna). The Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) continued to communicate with the EC on lifting the restrictions for the rest of the country. Bulgaria's latest ASF status can be found in EC [Regulation 2021/605](#), Annex I.

ASF severely hit the country in mid-2019. To date, Bulgaria saw 62 outbreaks among domestic pigs, per the BFSA [data](#), including 11 on large industrial swine farms. The last large outbreak occurred on October 1, 2020, on a farm with over 550 pigs. 192,000 pigs were culled in 2019, followed by 65,000 in 2020. In November 2019, official statistics reported 492,000 total pigs, including 51,000 breeding sows, representing a 25 percent decline of the national swine herd and a 28 percent for breeding sows from 2018. The number of farms raising pigs declined by 74 percent year-on-year. According to the Minister of Agriculture, the GOB spent 134 million leva (\$81 million) on ASF-related expenses and 18 million leva (\$11 million) extra budget for ASF emergency activities executed by the BFSA.

The pork industry, in close coordination with the BFSA, worked hard to improve its biosecurity standards and practices. On April 9 2021, the Cabinet approved the [Plan for ASF Surveillance and Eradication](#) for 2021 to 2023. On March 17, the BFSA approved an ASF [Action Plan](#) for backyard farms. Similar regulations were implemented in 2019 and 2020 after ASF outbreaks, which included more stringent biosecurity measures, especially for backyard farms. The industry also undertook additional voluntary biosecurity standards. For example, workers on hog farms committed to not engage in backyard hog production, hunting, collecting wild herbs, and visiting other farms. In 2020 and 2021, ASF-related efforts were further complicated by COVID pandemic and higher feed prices.

Commercial Pork Industry Progress to Date

Bulgaria's commercial pork industry was successfully developing prior to the ASF crisis. The share of locally-produced pork on the market reached 37 percent in 2018 with the unrealized potential to expand to 42 percent in 2019 and 49 percent in 2020 ([Inteliagro study](#)). However, the sudden decline in the Bulgarian hog population resulted in a 19 percent decline in the 2020 lower slaughter and an 18 percent decline in the local pork supply. This stimulated a six-percent increase in 2020 pork imports (133,000 MT) over 2019, followed by a 28 percent increase in pork imports in January 2021 from January 2020, mainly from other EU suppliers. The drop in overall EU pork prices negatively affected local prices as well. As of March 2021, the average Bulgarian price of Class E carcasses was 19.5 percent lower than in March 2020 ([EU meat market observatory](#), Pigmear CMO Committee April 22) which represented a significant challenge for the recovery of the local industry.

Despite the challenges, Bulgaria's commercial farms persistently repopulated and imported 60,000 breeding pigs in 2020--over double the number from 2019 (27,000). As a result, Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) data indicates that in November 2020, the total swine number increased by 20 percent to 592,000 head, including a 13 percent increase in the number of breeding sows to 66,000 head. This increase marked the biggest jump in 2020 for hog populations among all EU Member States and are close to pre-ASF levels (see EC data [here](#)).

Backyard Farms Decline

Over the last two years, the GOB prioritized controlling ASF among backyard farms. Per the newly adopted regulations, depopulated farms can resume activities only under updated, more stringent biosecurity standards. Although the registration process is free and simplified, many backyard farms are not likely to respond to new criteria. For instance, the number of backyard farms in the heavily affected Rousee region was 770 in 2019, but only 37 backyard farms are registered under the new rules as of May 2021. At least 38,000 backyard farms were reported to be hit by ASF, to date, and only 6,000 of them are reportedly operating under the new requirements as of the spring of 2021. Backyard farms cannot raise more than three pigs for fattening and breeding sows is not allowed.

Wild Boar Population Drops

Controlling ASF among wild boars became another GOB priority. GOB authorities passed new legislation allowing for more liberal boar hunting. The BFSA [database](#) reported that the ASF detections among wild animals were 185 in 2019 and 533 in 2020. Through May 2021, there were 157 wild boar detection, with the most recent one registered on April 20. According to the MinAg, the wild boars shot during the last hunting season 2020/2021 were about 60 percent fewer (12,200 boars) than one year ago (32,400 boars). The wild boar population was reduced to an average of 0.3 boars/100 hectares or about 20,000 head for the country.

Attachments:

No Attachments.