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Business as Usual After ASF Cases Identified in Slaughterhouse

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

Livestock and Products

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

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Report Highlights:

Hong Kong confirmed three cases of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the Sheung Shui slaughterhouse on September 3. Unlike the previous cases in May, this time there is no culling of pigs in the infected area. The government explained culling is not necessary due to the implementation of a recent measure that prohibits live pigs from remaining in the slaughterhouse more than 24 hours, making thorough cleansing and disinfection possible on a daily basis.

Following two cases of ASF in May this year, Hong Kong identified three dead pigs in the slaughterhouse carrying the ASF virus on September 3. The pigs in question were among a batch of live pigs imported to Hong Kong from mainland China on September 2. The pigs passed the inspection by veterinarians at the slaughterhouse without displaying any ASF symptoms but died prior to slaughtering. Ensuing test results confirmed they were infected with ASF.

The reaction of the Hong Kong government (HKG) is very different from the two previous ASF cases in May. This time, no culling was ordered and business is operating as usual. The HKG explained that this is possible because of the recently imposed daily clearance measure, by which all live pigs will be slaughtered within 24 hours of entry to the slaughterhouse. Under this measure, the slaughterhouse is able to thoroughly clean and disinfect the plant every day, which will reduce the risk of spreading the virus to local farms.

The market has not reflected a significant reaction to the new ASF cases either. The media did not cover the story extensively. Most consumers have long switched to buy frozen meats given the recent high prices of fresh pork and this new round of cases is unlikely to render any substantial impact on their consumption choices.

When Hong Kong confirmed two cases of ASF in the same slaughterhouse in May, the government ordered the culling of all pigs in the slaughterhouse, which was considered as an infected area. A total of 10,675 pigs were culled and the plant was closed for four and seven days, respectively, for thorough cleansing and disinfection. Trade was abruptly disrupted.

Since the resumption of slaughterhouse's operations, the daily supply of live pigs to Hong Kong has been halved to less than 2,000 compared to the pre-ASF level of 4,000. Supply has not yet fully rebounded because of commercial decisions of pig farms in China, who are taking advantage of record pork prices in the mainland instead of supplying animals to the Hong Kong market.