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Animal Health Advisory September 2018

Be aware of the threat: African Swine Fever (ASF)

The growing number of diagnosed cases of African swine fever (ASF) throughout China is raising concern within the Delaware Department of Agriculture, as well as the pork industry. The highly contagious nature of this virus is very threatening and there is currently no vaccine. Swine producers need to be aware of signs of ASF, communicate with their veterinarians, and increase biosecurity to protect their herds. Even a farm with just a few pigs could become infected and spread the virus to other farms in Delaware. The ASF virus does not pose a threat to human health or food safety.

Why is ASF in China a threat to Delaware?

China is the number one pork producer in the world with 433 million head of swine. The cases of ASF are being detected in locations that are thousands of miles apart. This pattern suggests that the disease is traveling long distances by a means other than simple transport of infected pigs. People, vehicles, and feedstuffs are all possible carriers of the virus. Furthermore, China is a source of animal feed and feed additives for the United States. Delawareans and visitors to the state, who are involved in international travel to areas with ASF should take precautions prior to having direct contact with a domestic herd of pigs.

What are signs of ASF in pigs?

The challenge of quickly recognizing and containing ASF is that symptoms in swine can initially mimic other, more common diseases including salmonellosis, erysipelas, and Porcine Respiratory and Reproduction Syndrome (PRRS). Producers should enlist the help of their veterinarians if they observe sick pigs so a diagnosis can be made. If you don't have a veterinarian, call the Delaware Department of Agriculture for contact information for a local veterinarian, at 302-698-4500 (during business hours) or 302-233-1480 (after-hours emergency number).

Clinical signs of ASF vary widely, but often include high fever, decreased appetite, and weakness. Skin may be blotchy, reddened, or have blackened lesions. Infected pigs may exhibit diarrhea, vomiting, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Pregnant sows may abort. Photos of pigs affected with ASF may be viewed at: <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/disease-images.php?name=african-swine-fever&lang=en>

High mortality in a herd is the most significant sign that warrants a call to a veterinarian. Death generally occurs 7 days to 10 days after disease is first noted; however, sudden death can occur in newly exposed herds. Animals that recover can carry and shed the virus for several months.

Veterinarians who visit your farm will need to collect blood samples for testing at an official USDA-network laboratory to confirm or rule out disease.

How is ASF spread?

The virus is easily spread between pigs by direct contact or indirectly from contact with contaminated objects. Research shows the virus can survive in the environment, on shoes, clothing, vehicles, and in feed components. Uncooked or undercooked meat, including refrigerated and frozen products, can carry the virus, making garbage feeding and smuggled food items a major threat. Ticks, flies, and other insects may also spread the virus. Feeding of garbage to pigs is illegal in Delaware.

Geographic Distribution of ASF

In addition to the current outbreak in China, African swine fever is known to be endemic in most of sub-Saharan Africa including the island of Madagascar. Outbreaks have been reported periodically outside Africa. The virus was eventually eradicated in most cases, although it remains endemic on the island of Sardinia (Italy) in the Mediterranean. In 2007, ASF virus was introduced into the Caucasus region of Eurasia, via the Republic of Georgia, and it has spread to domesticated pigs and/or wild boars in a number of countries in this region. As of 2015, infections had been reported as far west as Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. Viruses that apparently originated from this outbreak have also been found in wild boar in the Middle East (Iran).

Excellent resources for preventing ASF from infecting the pigs at your farm

1. Maintaining a high level of on-farm biosecurity is the best protection. Some important biosecurity procedures to follow at all times on your farm are found at this site:

<http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/pdf/how-to-protect-your-herd>

2. Avoid hosting international visitors if possible. If your farm is hosting international visitors you should proactively follow the guidelines found at this website:

http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Species/Swine/TravelBiosecurity_Handout_International_Visitors.pdf

3. Use extreme caution if traveling abroad. If you or someone who works on your farm is traveling abroad you should proactively follow the guidelines found at this website:

http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Species/Swine/TravelBiosecurity_Handout_Traveling_Overseas.pdf

What to do if you suspect ASF on your farm

You must immediately contact your veterinarian or call DDA at 302-698-4500 during business hours or use our after-hours emergency number at 302-233-1480.

Learn More

More information about ASF and the situation in China can be found online at:

<https://www.pork.org/production/animal-disease/foreign-animal-disease-resources/>

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