

An update of African swine fever in Europe

Incursions of the African swine fever (ASF) virus into Bulgaria and Belgium

The two last significant episodes with regard to ASF in Europe occurred during the second half of 2018. The first outbreak was confirmed in a backyard farm in Bulgaria on 31 August and a little later in wild boar; while the disease was also found in mid-September, in wild boar only, in a limited zone of south-east Belgium. Both countries reacted swiftly and have implemented all measures required by regulation, as well as the recommendations of the Standing Group of Experts for ASF in Europe under the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) umbrella.

All across Europe, Member Countries are stepping up their preparations against ASF

These two episodes demonstrate that the virus is still progressing south on the eastern side of the European Union, and that it can also jump long distances and appear suddenly in unexpected places, far away from the infected zones. Therefore, across Europe, countries are stepping up their preparations against ASF in the following areas: surveillance; biosecurity; awareness of farmers, hunters and travellers; laboratory capacity, etc.

Guidance and practical material have been made available under the GF-TADs umbrella

In this effort, governments can rely on recommendations and material put together under the GF-TADs coordination, which are based on the latest scientific knowledge and the experience of those countries that have already been affected. In particular, it appears that wild boar are a key component of ASF risk in Europe. A lot of emphasis has therefore been put on this issue. Just recently, the last GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts on ASF in Europe (Warsaw, Poland, September 2018) focused on the biology of wild boar. Soon after, the GF-TADs published online the '[Handbook on African Swine Fever in wild boar and biosecurity during hunting](#)'. It provides a fact-based overview of ASF ecology in the Northern and Eastern European populations of wild boar, and describes a range of practical management and biosecurity measures or interventions, which can help to address the disease. Moreover, on 19 December 2018, the European Commission convened a Ministerial Conference on the Eradication of African swine fever in the EU and long-term management of wild boar populations.

Success story in the Czech Republic

There is also some good news on the ASF front in Europe. The virus was unexpectedly detected in the wild boar population only of a limited region in June 2017. The Czech authorities vigorously implemented the response strategy and were able to contain the disease and avoid any contamination in the domestic pig sector. Not only have they been able to avoid any further spread of the disease, but they are also well under way to eradication, as demonstrated by the absence of any positive case since early 2018. It is expected that the final eradication of ASF in wild boar in the Czech Republic will be acknowledged in the coming weeks, with the official recovery of the free status of ASF in wild boar of the Czech Republic, and its recognition by the European Union.

The next meeting of the GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts for ASF in Europe will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, on 11 and 12 March, and will focus on the Czech success story.

Background

The current episode of ASF in Europe can be traced back to 2007, in Georgia. Over the following years, the disease moved northwards through Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It was first detected in the European Union in early 2014, but was contained to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Eastern Poland for the next three and a half years. Since mid-2017, the virus has resumed its progression, either with long unexpected geographical jumps (Czech Republic, Hungary, Belgium), or the contamination of neighbouring regions, mainly southwards (Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria). It is largely considered that the human factor (transport and mishandling of contaminated meat products, swill feeding, etc.) is the main vector for the contamination of new territories.

Further information:

- GF-TADs for Europe, [ASF webpage](#).
- Download the '[Handbook on African Swine Fever in wild boar and biosecurity during hunting](#)'



■ January 2019