

**For discussion
on 12 November 2019**

Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Latest progress on the work in response to African Swine Fever

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members of the latest progress of the Government's work in response to African Swine Fever (ASF).

BACKGROUND

2. About 90% of live pigs supplied in Hong Kong are imported from the Mainland and the remaining 10% come from local pig farms. Since the first ASF case found on the Mainland in August 2018, the HKSARG has been closely monitoring the development of outbreak, as well as implementing a suite of preventive measures in collaboration with the trade and devising contingency plans. We have reported the said work to Members on 8 January 2019 (vide LC Paper No. CB(2)528/18-19(07)).

3. Two ASF cases were found in Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH) on 10 May and 31 May 2019 respectively. We have briefed Members of the financial commitment for culling of pigs by the Government due to ASF and measures to strengthen the prevention and control on 11 June 2019 (vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1594/18-19(07)).

LATEST SITUATION

Development of outbreak

4. According to the information published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, there were 157 cases found in various provinces on the Mainland as at 16 October 2019. In addition, there were also outbreaks in a number of nearby Asian countries one after the other.

5. Since there is currently neither vaccine nor medication available for prevention or treatment and ASF virus is tough and fast-spreading, ASF could cause massive death in pigs within a short period of time. So far, neither the Mainland nor other countries has developed safe and sound ASF vaccine for practical application. It may take a longer period of time to bring outbreaks under complete and effective control.

Latest progress on prevention and control work

6. The Government has been striving to prevent and control ASF at different levels in the past year, with a view to reducing the risk of ASF virus spreading in Hong Kong and the impact on the supply of live pigs.

(i) Control and surveillance on imported live pigs at source

7. Control and surveillance at source are of utmost importance to prevent ASF. As to live pigs supplied from the Mainland, the General Administration of Customs (GAC) has been exercising stringent inspection and quarantine, and striving to ensure steady supply of live pigs to Hong Kong in collaboration with other Mainland ministries. All pigs must come from registered pig farms supplying Hong Kong and be segregated for 15 days to ensure the pigs are free of ASF symptoms before they are discharged from the farms. Monitoring and inspection was conducted at all checkpoints during transportation as well as in and out of the Qingshuihe transfer house located in Shenzhen. Pigs showing abnormality at any stage would not be supplied to Hong Kong. The Mainland authorities have also stepped up the cleansing, disinfection and biosecurity of the transfer house. If any pigs on a pig-carrying truck are found dead or showing symptoms suspected to be connected with ASF-infection when the truck arrives at the transfer house, all pigs on the truck must be returned with a view to preventing impacts on the transfer house.

8. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) ensured at Man Kam To Control Point that all Mainland live pigs arriving in Hong Kong were accompanied with valid health certificates issued by the Mainland Customs. Veterinary officers also conducted inspection on health conditions of live pigs at the control point.

9. It is an internationally recognised practice to carry out ASF screening among live pigs through inspection of clinical symptoms. When a veterinary officer finds that there is abnormal mortality in pigs which present with clinical signs and post-mortem signs consistent with ASF at Man Kam To Control Point or slaughterhouses, samples will be collected for ASF testing.

(ii) Enhancing biosecurity at slaughterhouses

10. Since August last year, SSSH and Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse have strengthened the cleansing and disinfection work for vehicles and personnel entering and leaving the slaughterhouses, lairages and the slaughter lines, and installed equipment such as pressurised water pumps and hot water high pressure jets etc. to enhance the cleansing effectiveness. SSSH has also installed disinfection pools at the entrance and exit since February 2019 to thoroughly disinfect the wheels of vehicles entering and leaving the slaughterhouse. FEHD and slaughterhouse operators deployed additional manpower resources to supervise the cleansing work in order to ensure that vehicles were thoroughly cleansed and disinfected before leaving.

11. In addition, FEHD has been carrying out improvement works in SSSH

since July this year, including the improvement of ventilation system for pig lairages, and the conversion of part of the cattle lairages as pig lairages to provide more lairages for the slaughterhouse operator to accommodate pigs, with a view to facilitating cleansing and disinfection of the lairages.

12. There were two ASF cases found in Hong Kong in May this year. Having taken into account the views of local and overseas experts and with the support of the trade, the Government has imposed a daily clearance arrangement, which means all live pigs must be slaughtered within 24 hours upon admittance into the slaughterhouses. Under the new arrangement, lairages in different areas of the slaughterhouses were cleared for cleansing and disinfection on a daily basis. Given the short stay of pigs in the slaughterhouses, which underwent thorough cleansing and disinfection daily, the risk of ASF spreading in Hong Kong was largely minimised. The implementation of the daily clearance arrangement is smooth so far. We will ensure that the arrangement is sustained and followed through.

13. At the second meeting of the standing group of experts on ASF organised by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in July this year, there was an in-depth discussion on the prevention and control measures against ASF. The attending experts regarded that each region should take its own situation into consideration, such as the stocking density, demand and supply of live pigs etc., to formulate effective and practical measures and policies. Given that the local slaughterhouses have already implemented the daily clearance arrangement, the experts considered that the possibilities of infecting other pigs in Hong Kong has been largely minimised. If an ASF case occurs in a local slaughterhouse in future, the closure of the slaughterhouse and massive culling of other pigs are not necessary. Other pigs can be slaughtered as usual and supplied to market for consumption.

14. Owing to the aforementioned expert advice, the Government has updated the contingency plans and put them into practice when ASF virus was found in the samples of three pigs from the SSSH on 3 September 2019. The operation of SSSH was not affected and the slaughtering process was carried out as usual, lessening the impact on the public and stakeholders.

(iii) Stepping up biosecurity at local farms

15. Regarding local farms, AFCD continued to implement various measures to assist the trade to prevent ASF, including suspending the importation of breeders from the Mainland since September 2018, and banning the storage or use of swill of pork origin or in contact with pork or pork products as feed since 12 January 2019 to prevent spreading of ASF via the contaminated pork or pork products. If any licencees violate the licence conditions, AFCD will consider terminating the livestock keeping licence.

16. In addition, AFCD has been enhancing promotion on preventive measures against ASF and ensuring that proper biosecurity measures were implemented at pig farms. At the same time, AFCD has been deploying staff to inspect the health condition of pigs and biosecurity at local pig farms, and to request pig farmers to strictly

control the vehicles and personnel entering pig farms, recommend pig farmers to ban staff from bringing pork and pork products into the farms and enhance the cleansing and disinfection of vehicles and personnel entering and leaving pig farms etc. AFCD conducted inspections to all pig farms regularly. If pigs are suspected to be infected with ASF, AFCD will conduct disease investigation and collect samples for testing. There are no suspected cases found in Hong Kong so far.

(iv) Strengthening testing capabilities

17. If a suspected case is identified after ASF screening, it is necessary to conduct a laboratory testing to effectively differentiate whether the pig is infected with ASF or other pig infectious diseases. Tai Lung Veterinary Laboratory of AFCD has been strengthening its ASF testing capabilities via technical exchanges, training and international accreditation.

(v) Combating illegal importation of raw meat

18. FEHD continued to work with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) to step up enforcement efforts on cracking down illegal importation of raw meat by passengers into Hong Kong. Between January and September 2019, FEHD has brought 247 prosecutions and issued 100 warning letters on the cases concerned. FEHD will only issue warning letters to passengers who carry raw meat into Hong Kong for the first time and via the Goods to Declare Channel. If passengers carry raw meat into Hong Kong again, FEHD will bring a prosecution directly without any warning.

(vi) Publicity and public education

19. The relevant Government departments have endeavoured to, via different channels and formats, disseminate relevant messages about ASF and promote the Government's work in response to ASF on various fronts in the past year. Among them, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of FEHD disseminated the messages about prevention of ASF to public via channels like newspaper advertisement, announcements of public interest, radio soundtracks, newsletters, websites, trade forums and seminars, online videos and social medial platform etc., reminding public that ASF will not be transmitted to human and poses no food safety risk but pork must be cooked well before consumption. FEHD also stepped up promotion of the message that it is an offence to carry raw meat into Hong Kong without a health certificate via social media and by posting posters at control points, MTR stations and cabinets.

Pork supply

20. While the Mainland authorities have strived to maintain supply of live pigs to Hong Kong, the overall production and supply of live pigs on the Mainland have also been greatly affected by the outbreak of ASF. According to the latest figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of pigs supplied to the market in the first three quarters this year and the number of pigs stocked at farms in end September recorded a year-on-year decline of 17.3% and 28.5% respectively. Since

May this year, the supply of live pigs from the Mainland has been declining.

21. Taking the snapshot figures in mid-October as an example, the daily supply of live pigs from the Mainland was some 1 500 heads, which has dropped for around 60% as the daily supply was some 4 000 heads before. The daily average auction price was some \$3,000 per picul, which has increased to more than double as compared with the level recorded before May this year (i.e. around \$1,300 per picul).

22. We noticed that there were some adjustments in the market in view of the decline in supply of live pigs. The volume of chilled pork imported from the Mainland has increased since May this year and has once surged to some 24 000 kilograms per day, which was 60% higher than the level before May at 15 000 kilograms per day.

23. As estimated earlier by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the supply of pork in the second half of this year will be further tightened. In this regard, the Mainland authorities have launched a series of measures to increase pig production with a view to resuming steady supply of live pigs. However, as breeding takes time, it is estimated that the supply will remain tightened for a period of time.

24. The low supply of live pigs and surge in price have caused impact on the public and the trade. The Government announced in August this year a series of helping measure for enterprises and residents, and some of these measures can ease the financial pressure on industries affected by ASF and the supply of live pigs. These measures include reducing rental by half for six months for stalls in public markets of FEHD, and waiving the licence fee for fresh provision shops, slaughterhouses and pig farms for a year.

WAY FORWARD

25. The Government will continue to closely monitor the development of the outbreak and improve epidemic prevention work, while liaising with different parties to minimise the risk of transmission and maintain steady supply of live pigs. We will also continue to maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities on supply of live pigs and reflect the desire of the local trade and the public. In addition, we are seeking funding approval from the Legislative Council Finance Committee for providing statutory compensation and ex-gratia payments to those pig owners affected by culling operations due to ASF.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
November 2019**