FACT SHEET:

African Swine Fever

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS AFRICAN SWINE FEVER?

- African swine fever (ASF) is a serious viral disease that only impacts pigs. There is no evidence that the ASF virus can infect humans, and it is not considered a food safety risk (CFIA, 2021).
- ASF can cause fever, internal bleeding, and high death rates. Death rates and the degree of illness vary with the strain of the virus, with more severe strains killing almost 100 percent of infected pigs (CFIA, 2021).
- It is contagious and can spread between pigs through both direct and indirect contact with other infected pigs or pig products, as well as contaminated farm equipment, feed and clothing (CFIA, 2021).

This fact sheet has been designed to complement the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing's (CCAW) Response Toolkit for Agricultural Crises. Find the Toolkit and other crisis-specific fact sheets on the CCAW website.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL WELLBEING

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ASF IMPACTS ON FARMS AND FARMERS

ASF has not yet been detected in Canada. Still, as it spreads around the globe, it poses a significant risk to the health of the Canadian swine herd, the pork industry and the Canadian economy (AAFC, 2022). The disease will also have detrimental impacts on biodiversity and the livelihoods of farmers (WOAH, 2022).

The Government of Canada is investing up to $45.3 million between 2022-24 to support industry-led efforts to prevent and prepare for ASF (AAFC, 2023). In particular, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Canadian Pork Council (CPC) are taking several proactive measures to help reduce the risk of ASF being introduced in Canada, including investments in monitoring and response measures, research, emergency preparedness planning, and import restrictions (CFIA, 2021; CPC, n.d.).

ASF has the potential to devastate herds and the farmers who care for them. As such, in addition to the prevention and preparedness efforts mentioned above, an important component of these efforts will involve a focus on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of farmers who may find themselves dealing with ASF.

Specific impacts of ASF outbreaks as they relate to farmer wellbeing and livelihoods are described below.

Euthanasia and Loss of Animals

During outbreaks, controlling the spread of ASF can be difficult and must be adapted to the specific situation (WOAH, n.d.). No treatment for ASF is currently available (CPC, n.d.). ASF outbreaks will almost certainly require farmers to euthanize their entire herds, infected or not.

Euthanizing animals will very likely take a heavy toll on the mental health of farmers and their staff. Farmers aim to raise healthy animals and will go to great lengths to protect them; euthanasia is typically a last resort.

Financial Impacts

The disease is known for its economic impact on smallholders and emerging commercial farmers (WOAH, 2020). Many farmers around the world have lost or will lose their businesses due to ASF (WOAH, 2020).

If ASF were to be detected in Canada, impacts would particularly be felt in rural areas where hog farms and processing facilities sustain communities (AAFC, 2022). These significant economic impacts of ASF would have lasting impacts on farmer mental health (Province of Manitoba, 2022).

Loss of Agency and Control

Farming is widely known as a high-stress profession, and many of the stressors that farmers experience are outside of their direct control, which can exacerbate stress (Hagen, 2020). Changes in trade agreements, supply management, and governmental regulations are among the potential stressors that are outside farmers' direct control. Many farmers are used to being self-sufficient, and feel a lot of pride in their abilities to lead their operations.

In the interviews conducted by CCAW with farmers and individuals working in various aspects of the agricultural industry, interviewees described how government intervention during ASF outbreaks, while essential, would also likely lead to farmers feeling a loss of agency and control over their operations.

Loss of Legacy, Identity, and Livelihood

Farmers often gain a strong sense of meaning and purpose from farming, as it brings them fulfillment and confidence in who they are and what they do (Hagen, 2020). Given the nature of farming as an all-encompassing occupation, lifestyle, and identity, a crisis such as ASF that has the potential to limit or even inhibit a farmer's ability to farm will in turn impact their ability to access their sense of meaning and purpose.

It is important to understand the extent of these impacts on farmers to ensure mental health support during an agricultural crisis is as empathetic as possible, and takes into account the substantial emotional weight farmers may be carrying.

ASF IMPACTS ON INDUSTRY

An ASF outbreak will not only impact the farms that it is discovered on but will have wide-ranging impacts on other farms across Canada.

The Canadian pork sector generates over $24 billion for the Canadian economy, and contributes over 100,000 direct and indirect jobs (AAFC, 2022). Canada is the third-largest pork exporting country in both value and volume and represents about 14% of world pork trade (CFIA, 2022).

Even a single case of ASF in Canada would result in Canada ceasing its pork and live hog exports (AAFC, 2022). Herds will be quarantined, exports will be halted, production will be stopped, and shipments will be unable to reach farms.

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