

**Conclusions and recommendations from the Chief Veterinary Officers meeting on
African swine fever in the Western Balkan Countries
(31 August 2023)**

General

- African swine fever (ASF) keeps spreading globally and remains one of the most challenging animal health issues. The EU has been affected by this disease since 2014.
- The recent spread of ASF further in Europe, in countries of the Western Balkan Region represents an additional challenge for the Region and therefore common efforts should be improved and adequate resources should be ensured to prevent, control and eradicate the disease in Europe and globally.
- Recent expert missions in Western Balkan countries (EUVET / GF-TADs)¹ identified several systematic challenges, such as the registration of pig establishments, and the identification and tracing of pigs that implies severe deficiencies on movements controls. This puts in danger the efficient application of disease prevention and control measures by the competent authorities, and is one of the main reasons for the worsening ASF situation in the region.
- Surveillance for early detection, with highest emphasis on passive surveillance, is a key part of any ASF prevention, control and eradication strategy. ASF needs to be detected and reported as quickly as possible, so that onward spread can be prevented and that relevant outbreak is eradicated without any undue delay. Awareness and regular dialogue between all involved is essential.
- Improved biosecurity is crucial in the prevention of entry and further spread of ASF both in the commercial and in non-commercial pig establishments. The underestimation of biosecurity and the human factor are among the main drivers of the ASF virus introduction and further spread.
- In ASF affected or at-risk areas, preventive slaughter of pigs in non-commercial establishments with poor biosecurity practices should be considered and incentivized as appropriate.
- Wild boar play an important role in the transmission and persistence of ASF virus, representing a constant threat for pig farms. The control and reduction, where relevant, of the wild boar population in Europe is part of the solution in the coordinated management of ASF.
- Recommendations from the recent EUVET/GF-TADs missions on ASF should be taken into account by all the countries in the region and addressed without undue delay, where relevant. Technical measures should be based on science and experience.
- EU can offer more support and all available instruments (EU STMs, EUVET, BTSF, EURL etc.)² can be considered and requested by the countries to ensure ASF preparedness, control and eradication.

¹ European Union Veterinary Emergency Team (EUVET)/Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever under the Global Framework for the Control of Transboundary Diseases (SGE on ASF under GF-TADs Europe).

² Sustained Training Missions (STM), Better training for safer food (BTSF), European Union Reference Laboratory (EURL).

- All countries in the region, EU Member States and non-EU countries equally, should actively cooperate, participate and transparently exchange on ASF situation (e.g. through SGE ASF under the GF-TADs and timely notifications in ADIS and WAHIS)³.

Preparedness, cooperation and science

- Preparedness and cooperation to build trust, increases transparency and ensure coordinated actions, should be improved in particular at the borders and at Regional level.
- To prevent, early detect and control ASF each country should continue using science-based disease control measures.

Awareness strengthening and training:

- Awareness campaigns and dialogues, should be regularly carried out to inform, educate and motivate all stakeholders in order to increase surveillance and improve reporting.
- Awareness and specific trainings should aim to reach directly involved stakeholders (farmers, hunters, private and public veterinarians) and also long-distance transporters, passengers, seasonal workers and the general public.
- Multilingual materials are of importance, in particular when ASF is spreading at borders. Materials already publicly available on the website of GF-TADs Europe could be used by the Western Balkan countries for their information campaigns.

Identification and registration

- All pig establishments (including non-commercial or ‘backyard’ establishments) must be registered, and pigs identified. Movements of pigs need to be monitored and controlled. Traceability of the animals must be achieved by ensuring correct identification and exchange of information as well as record keeping.

Passive surveillance, early detection and timely reporting

- Passive surveillance is the most effective tool for early detection of ASF. An ASF surveillance system has to be in place in the domestic pig and in the wild boar populations. In commercial pig establishments, as well as in small non-commercial pig establishments, pig keepers should be informed and trained to immediately report any suspicion of ASF and any sick or dead pigs.
- The system for the compensation of farmers needs to be fair and incentivize the early reporting of ASF suspicions by the pig keepers.

Biosecurity

- Implementation of minimum biosecurity measures is key, even for smallholder pig keepers. These may include restricting access to visitors and means of transport on the establishments, preventing contact between domestic pigs and wild boar (including

³ Animal Diseases Information System (ADIS)/World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS)

indirect contact through feeding or hunting practices), using separate shoes and clothes when entering the pig house, and having disinfectants ready on site.

- A biosecurity plan should be considered as good tool and provide for building good infrastructure (e.g. fences/security/filters) of pig establishments, as well as describing “biosecurity routines” and best practice aimed at changing attitudes and behaviors to reduce risk in all activities involving animals and their products.

Wild boar management

- A long-term planning on how to control and reduce wild boar populations and ensure optimal coordination of national resources involved, and at the borders where relevant, should be implemented and coordinated within each country in the framework of the prevention, control and eradication of ASF.
- Tailor made long-term strategy on wild boar populations in the context of ASF should be considered by Western Balkan countries.