GF-TADs
GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROGRESSIVE CONTROL OF TRANSBOUNDARY ANIMAL DISEASES

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

OIE WORLD ORGANISATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH

Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever in Europe

under the GF-TADs umbrella

Eleventh meeting (SGE ASF11)
Warsaw, Poland, 24-25 September 2018

REPORT

PARTICIPANTS

See attached list of participants, representing the 13 members of the SGE ASF, 13 observer countries, and representatives from FACE (hunters association), the European Commission, EFSA, the FAO and the OIE.

Objectives of the meeting

The main objectives of the SGE ASF11 were to have an update on epidemiological in each affected country, discuss the epidemiology of disease in wild boar and in the environment, and to move forward on the GF-TADs Handbook on ASF in wild boar.

All powerpoint presentations are available on the GF-TADs for Europe website.

ASF preparedness in South-East Europe

Budimir Plavsic (OIE delegate Serbia) presented the level of preparedness of the countries from South-East Europe not yet infected but at high risk of getting infected (Austria, Slovakia and 9 countries or territories of the Balkan region), based on a questionnaire submitted in September.
In a nutshell:

- a very large majority of the 10 respondants apply the standards and have national legislation in place, appropriate material and documentation for early reaction, a developed cooperation with stakeholders, other national services and neighbouring countries.
- However there is room for improvement on the training of veterinary services, awareness raising campaigns, the setting of a national scientific capacity, the funding in case of multiple outbreaks, the implementation of some of the past recommendations of the GF-TADs SGE ASF.

  - EC mentioned the ongoing tools/initiatives developed to help the countries, including EUVET support, BTSF and workshops.

- PL stresses the need for the appropriate laboratory capacity to deal with the high number of testing required by active surveillance once the disease is there (control of movements, etc.).
- BG stresses the importance of awareness, which appears weaker than expected once the disease is there. Awareness of hunters is particularly key for the best possible results.

Updates from the countries member of the SGE ASF

Belarus

An estimated 4000 wild boars are left in Belarus in 2018, down from 130.000 initially, after intensive hunting over the last years including a compensation of 70€/animal. Killed wild boars are destroyed and not processed into food products. Pig breeding facilities without the proper biosecurity measures are closed down by the authorities (8 in 2018). ASF reached Belarus in 2013 despite a lot of preparation. The situation was dealt with via the enforcement of a "constitution".

Czech Republic

No change of the situation, same very little region infected in wild boars only. The last positive boar was found on 15 April (date of death at the end of 2017 probably). There was no outbreak in domestic pigs in CZ. Hunting management was very carefully adjusted to the identification of the infected zone and to the level of risk. One of the lessons learned is that the assessment of the wild boar population in a particular zone is very difficult.

Estonia

The wild boar population has been dramatically reduced since 2014, including trough intensive hunting, according to a contract signed with the hunters.

Hungary

Hungary had been anticipating the disease when it eventually identified in a dead wild boar in April 2018. 19 cases have been found so far in this zone (the last one a few days ago). Probable source of infection: contact of the dead wild boars with contaminated food waste. A second area was found contaminated one month later, next to the border with Ukraine, with 18 cases so far. Emphasis is put on passive surveillance, including via a financial compensation system for searching for carcasses, and awareness campaigns.

Latvia

Stable situation, the hotspot now being in the western part of the country, even though cases discovered this year show that the virus is still active in the east and centre. The wild boar population has decreased as a result of the disease and intensive hunting, but hunting tends to decrease while it should be stepped up. A few outbreaks were confirmed in 2018, without any clearly identified breach of biosecurity. It is therefore important to increase the knowledge on the wild boar biology. Awareness is critical, not only of farmers and hunters, but of the society at large.

Lithuania

A 70 to 80% increase of positive dead wild boars has been noted in 2018. A number of outbreak have been confirmed, mostly during the summer, in areas where fresh wild boar cases occurred. One big commercial farm was infected despite strong biosecurity; hypothesis

to explain the introduction of the virus include the transport of straw in the farm, and the going in and out of employees. Significant awareness efforts and controls at all levels, including borders, are ongoing.

Moldova

The first cases in Moldova were confirmed in 2016. The population of pigs has since then been reduced by 25%, the wild boar population by 7% only. The identified cause of the first outbreaks in the north is the feeding of pigs with swill including pork bought in Ukraine. Moldova enforces a particular ban on importuning animal products at the border, but faces a complex situation.

Poland

The number of outbreaks in pigs has significantly increased in 2018, 70% of them in small farms, and a peak in summer/early autumn. In wild boars, the biggest number of cases is noted in areas recently infected (e.g. around Warsaw), and particularly in "ecological corridors" (forest areas with water resources). There is an ongoing awareness effort, particularly at the borders, and controls (passengers at the borders, disinfection of empty trucks for animal transport entering Poland, etc.); despite a significant increase of the fines, 143 tonnes of food have been confiscated at the borders since the beginning of the year. The testing of dead wild boars has been increased 5 folds in 2018 compared to 2017.

- The disinfection of means of transport by heat treatment (80°C) does not appear to applicable at this moment. A thorough cleaning followed by chemical disinfection remains the best method.

Romania

942 outbreaks in domestic pigs have been confirmed since the beginning of the year, and 69 positive wild boars, mainly in the south-east of the country. The peak of outbreaks was in July in pigs, now with a decreasing trend. Some preventive culling has been implemented in counties in the south-east. A few very big pig farms were infected, despite biosecurity, without a clear explanation as to how the virus entered these facilities. The meat produced during the incubation period of a farm later confirmed infected was traced; no infected product was put on the market. Together with the disease in wild boars, the widespread backyard system of pig raising is probably the reason for the rapid spreading of ASF this summer in Romania.

Russian Federation

ASF has been detected in domestic pig facilities in clusters separated by great distances over the last couple of years, including in the Kaliningrad oblast after the finding of a first positive dead wild boar at the end of 2017 followed by a significant number of outbreaks in 2018. The usual seasonality is also observed in the RF. The strategy recommended in Kaliningrad (eradication of wild boars and restriction of the backyard population) has been slow to implement. The RF also monitors carefully the evolution of the disease in China, particularly along their common border.

Ukraine

The disease started in 2012. Cases in wild boars and outbreaks in domestic pigs have been confirmed throughout the country, but in 2018 mainly in the south of the country, close to

the borders with Moldova and RO in particular. Wild boars have been involved in all confirmed outbreaks. Control and awareness efforts are ongoing, testing facilities are up and running. The set of measures implemented by Ukraine is like that in other countries.

Bulgaria

A first outbreak was confirmed on 30 August 2018 in a backyard, close to coast of the Black Sea (Varna region), as a result of a clinical suspicion, but without any clear introduction pathway. Bulgaria is pushing to eliminate all backyard pigs within a 20 km radius around a commercial facility.

Belgium

The first of a total of 9 cases in wild boar was confirmed and notified on 13 September 2018 in Etalle, a municipality located close to the borders with FR and LU. Emergency response was launched from the date of the initial suspicion (12 September), in cooperation with the stakeholders, and the expertise input of an EUVET mission. The infected zone identified is subject to a series of strict measures, including the prohibition of leisure activities. And it has been decided to preventively cull all domestic pigs in the infected area (about 4000 pigs). The most probable source of infection is considered to be the introduction into the environment of infected food.

Focus on wild boars

Wild boar ecology (Tomasz Podgorski - Poland)

The presentation covers the world distribution of wild boars, its habitat, eating behaviour, movements (mostly sedentary, home range is 5 to 8 km^2, long-distance can be observed but is not frequent), social behaviour (contacts between groups living more than 4 km away are only sporadic), annual cycle in the wild boar population, increasing wild boar population trend, existing estimation methods of the numbers (recreational hunting appears insufficient to stop the growth of the population), hunting methods and consequences on wild boar movements. There is a clear effect of population density, forest and distance from previous infection on occurrences of ASF in wild boars.

- It is stressed that a wild boar can act as a vector only for 5, maximum 10 days and move only a few kilometres, or not move at all due to fever. It was suggested that trapping could be a proper option to reduce the wild boar population. However, it is a complex and expensive activity.
- The finding of wild boar carcasses is a question of willingness and requires involving the knowledgeable people and be focused in a defined area.
- Survivors are not carriers.

The experience of hunters (Linda Dombrovska – FACE, Latvia)

The presentation describes how hunters are trained, organised, regulated, etc. Opened discussion and incentives are effective for a successful collaboration while prohibitions may be counterproductive. Wild boars are part of a much larger ecosystem as well of complex social and economic bonds, therefore the consequences of its eradication should be carefully assessed. The hunters are asking the authorities to have for data and the science right. They want to be considered as partners, not enemies.

- FACE shall be invited to future meetings of the SGE ASF under the GF-TADs umbrella.
- Stories of appropriate hunter's behaviour should be put forward as examples.

Update on the domestic / wild interface in ASF infected areas (Alexey Igolkin – Vladimir Institute, Russia)

The presentation covers in particular transmission pathways (carcasses in the habitat is a major one). Risk of direct transmission via virus excretion in saliva and urine is low, high by direct contact, rather low via contacts between groups. Indirect transmission through carcasses in the habitat can be very significant, due to the persistence of the virus in body fluids and soil material; other indirect transmission routes may also play a role. All operations with dead wild boars should be conducted under strict biosecurity conditions. Long distance contamination is mainly linked to ASF in domestic pigs and their products, and usually not in wild boars.

Update on ASF epidemiology in European wild boar (Vittorio Guberti, expert from an Italian institute)

The presentation details the 4 phases of the disease:

1. Introduction;
2. invasion: it requires a minimum wild boar threshold density, any action on this parameter needs to be implemented before the area becomes infected;
3. epidemic: the only sensible thing to do is to run a strong passive surveillance;
4. endemic: a critical wild boar community size is necessary for the disease to turn endemic; the management of the carcasses is the most important measure, more important than dealing with the living wild boars.
   - It is critical to explain to the political leaders of a newly infected country the timing of the infection and the best way forward to contain/eradicate the disease, which involves "doing nothing" doing the epidemic phase.
   - EFSA is working on the methodology to identify the infected area; it should probably be 4 or 5 times bigger than the "hard core area".
   - If distance is too long between the spot where the wild boar is shot and the closest dressing centre, evisceration can be done on the spot, and the viscera put in a strong plastic bag.
   - It is not useful to know the exact wild boar population, if the disease is there it just means that the number was enough.

Regional project (TCP) for ASF preparedness in the Balkans (Daniel Beltran-Alcrudo, FAO)

The presentation mentions the documents, tools, trainings and research developed by FAO with regards to ASF. It also provides details on the TCP project that is being proposed by FAO for the benefit of the countries of the Balkan region which is now at high risk for ASF. Its duration would be 18 months, its budget 400.000 USD, it will cover 5 different components, including on backyards, field exercises, awareness, etc.

GF-TADs Handbook on ASF – presentation (Vittorio Guberti, expert from an Italian institute)

The presentation describes the structure of the Handbook, it was peer-reviewed and is now finalized regarding the content. At this stage it needs to be decided how the edition will be finalized and how it will be published. It is already present in some countries.

- The Handbook shall now be made available on the web (web page of the GF-TADs for Europe). Once the editing completely reviewed, the FAO should, in accordance to its commitment, take care of its translation and publishing.

CLOSING REMARKS – FUTURE STEPS

The SGE ASF11 endorsed the attached recommendations.
The next meeting will take place in Prague next March, thanks to the Czech Republic authorities. The EC will try to organize a BTSF meeting back to back with the SGE ASF12 to benefit first hand from the experience of the CZ colleagues.

We would like to sincerely thank the European Union and the Government of Poland for kindly supporting and hosting the SGE ASF11.