



GF-TADs

GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE
PROGRESSIVE CONTROL OF
TRANSBOUNDARY ANIMAL DISEASES



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



WORLD ORGANISATION
FOR ANIMAL HEALTH

Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in the Baltics and Eastern Europe Region under the GF-TADs

Expert mission on African Swine Fever in **Belgium** **REPORT**¹

- ❖ **Period of the mission:** 16-19 June 2019.
- ❖ **GF TADs team:** Krzysztof Jażdżewski (team leader, PL), Ago Partel (EE) and Aleksey Igolkin (RU).
- ❖ **Places visited during the mission:**
 - *Central Veterinary Office (FASFC) in Brussels.*
 - *Flanders Region. LCU Office in Gent.*
 - *2 farms. One large, one small free range.*
 - *Walloon Region. Virton, ASF region infected*
- ❖ **Terms of Reference**

1. The experts should perform on the spot visits (as detailed in the Annex) in order to gather data and be in a position to formulate recommendations on disease management.
2. The experts should work with the Veterinary Services in order to determine the following aspects:
 - a. If African swine fever (ASF) is occurring in domestic pigs (both in commercial sector and the so-called back yard sector) and extent of the areas of occurrence.
 - b. If ASF is occurring in wild boar and geographical distribution of ASF in wild boar.
 - c. Formulate hypothesis on the drivers of ASF occurrence.

¹ Disclaimer: The views and recommendations expressed in this document are those of the independent experts and may not, in any circumstances, be construed as the official position of their organization, nor of the EC, OIE or FAO

3. Propose measures intended for the control and eradication of ASF under local conditions, in line with the OIE International Standards and the Recommendations formulated by the GF-TADs SGE on ASF.
4. The experts should report to the Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever in Europe under the OIE/FAO GF-TADs and to the Veterinary Services of the country being visited. A written report should be produced for each mission.

The itinerary of the visit is attached to the report.

The Kingdom Belgium is a federal state consisting of 3 autonomous regions – Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia.

The Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) is responsible for food safety and domestic animal health.

The autonomous, regional authorities are responsible for wildlife management and control of infectious diseases in wildlife, in cooperation with the FAFSC.

All ASF cases at the time of the mission were recorded in southern Belgium in Wallonia.

9/09/2018: 3 adult wild boars found dead in the town of Etalle.

10/09/2018: sick young wild boar shot in the town of Etalle.

12/10/2018: delineation by the Walloon Region of 3 "operational" zones within the infected zone, with a view to the management of wild boars :

- (a) kernel zone - ban for hunting, night shooting, searching of carcasses, feeding ban,
- (b) buffer zone - ban for hunting, night shooting, searching of carcasses, feeding ban,
- (c) reinforced observation zone – hunting allowed, searching of carcasses, feeding ban,

Later, the vigilance zone has been created by Walloon Region- intensive hunting and searching of carcasses, feeding ban.

Planned hunting in infected zone are in the so-called baiting places.

Inside the zones 5,000 pigs were present. Between 26.09.2018 and 03.10.2018 all pigs in initial infected zone were culled.

Preventive culling was based on:

- (a) the slaughter of pigs in slaughterhouses,
- (b) the slaughtering of pigs for own use,
- (c) the killing of pigs in rendering plants (larger farms). Full financial compensation was applied.

The procedures of RPEiR 1099/2009 were followed. Piglets were disposed of using CO₂.

The rules on the ban on the movement of pigs from the holding to which new pigs will be introduced are applied.

In January 2019 the initial infected area was extended to the west due to several WB cases of ASF outside the fenced territory. Moreover, in March 2019 also several WB cases occurred outside the fenced territory in the northern part of the area.

Until 13/06/2019, 3080 wild boars found dead or shot were sampled and analysed:

- 2910 in the part I & II of the annex 2014/709/EU [738 Culled (6+), 624 trapped (3+), 115 night shots (2+)] and
- 823 positive, all in part II.

Intervention teams called Forest Rangers have been established- specially created teams of shooters employed by the Wallonian authorities, operating in the infected area. They use night vision, thermal imaging and silencers for their operations. A network of traps has been implemented (+-150) mainly in the re-inforced observation and vigilance zones.

A combination of hunting and night shooting is used. All carcasses from the infected area and the re-inforced observation zone are collected in a specialized collection center, and then disposed of in the rendering plant.

Hunters shall receive 100 EU in the re-inforced observation zone and 50 EU in the vigilance zone for each wild boar brought to a wild boar collection centre.

By 14 June 2019, 180 km of fences had been established.

Part I of the Annex to CID 2014/709/EU is relatively small. There is an intensive hunting in Part I.

A Strategic Expert Group at national level is being set up to analyse the situation and assess the actions.

Additional procedures for washing and disinfection of vehicles transporting pigs to ASF countries have been established.

More than 5,500 pigs have been tested in 1200 farms. There were no positive results reported. Prohibition of activities in ASF-infected forests without compensation. However, exceptions to the forest work ban can be granted provided that biosecurity is implemented.

Until 14.06.2019 no tests for antibodies (ELISA) from feral pigs were conducted - PCR (genetic material detection) is applied for all samples from domestic pigs and wild boar.

The costs of all wild boar activities are supported by the Walloon government.

22 new veterinarians have been recruited at the federal level in the FASFC.

There were no feral pigs in Flanders until 2006. In 2018 1614 WB were hunted. The GF-TADs team was informed that at the present there is no estimation of population of WB due to lack of scientific method for calculation of WB population.

10 zones have been created on bordered with fences, highways, railway lines and national borders.

A prototype system of evaluation of the wild boar population based on the use of photo-traps placed in specific locations has been presented. Several hunting teams are currently doing this work.

No encouragement like artificial feeding, should be given to wild boar to come to the places with the photo- traps.

The preliminary results are encouraging. Sometimes vegetation interferes with taking good photos.

On this stage the system is not able to recognise individual animals, thus the same wild boar may be photographed several times.

Additionally, observations in Flanders show that due to availability of large feed base, females can achieve a breeding weight of about 35 kg in just 6 months of age. In addition, taking into account the hypothesis advanced for whole Europe, the population growth is caused by mild winters, increase of maize cultivation, large numbers of oaks which produce large quantities of fruit every 2-3 years.

Increased biosecurity requirements have been introduced for the around 7,200 pig farms in Belgium.

Belgium has no derogation for one pig under Identification and Registration of Animals.

Biosecurity controls are carried out by the owners as part of the self-assessment. Once a year the checklist for biosecurity will be done by a private practicing veterinarian who takes care of the farm. Every owner of a pig farm must have a contract with a veterinarian for epidemiological surveillance. As a standard, there are a min. 3 visits per year.

Attempts to introduce compartments are not advanced as most farms are family farms with up to 15,000 pigs.

Farms are divided into 2 groups: up to 3 pigs and above. It is now planned to change the law to make the requirements for biosecurity similar.

As regards the use of cereals and straw from infected areas, studies are currently underway.

As far as farmed feral pigs are concerned, only a few farms are registered.

Private practitioners working in pig sector do not take samples from WB because of the 72 hours of quarantine apply after the contact with wild boars. In addition, samples from wild boars are taken by veterinarians selected by the region who do not work with pigs.

Laboratory system:

- 1 National Reference Laboratory
- 2 Regional Laboratories for northern and southern Belgium.

WB samples are sent to the NRL. Samples of pigs are tested in regional laboratories. Confirmatory tests are carried out in the NRL. The reason for this separation is to avoid cross contamination.

Visit to the local branch of the FASFC in Gent.

LCU – Governmental, Local Control Unit for East Flanders. The FASFC was established in 2002 and employs 1310 people. The budget is 164 million EUR.

LCU can cover more than 1 administrative unit, e.g. visited office covers East Flanders and part of Flemish Brabant.

LCU is generally active in 3 sectors: primary production (including slaughterhouses), processing and distribution.

Primary production includes animal health requirements, identification and registration of animals and veterinary pharmaceuticals. Supervision is carried out through inspections and sampling as well as appropriate IT tools.

The central services develop:

- sampling plans including No and kind of samples, type of production,
- technical sheets, including the guide how to take a sample and how to protect them during the trip to laboratory,
- standard reports of sampling.

All controls are recorded. The FBO pays for each inspection following the detection of deficiencies.

Samples are taken on farms in case of suspicion.

The LCU has a standard level of frequency of compulsory farm inspections which is once in 12 years if a self-check system is in place. If there is no such system in place, official controls are carried out every 8 years.

At present, no changes are made to the control frequency system but additional control actions are organised for all farms.

Private practitioners carry out farm inspections at least 3 times a year.

The FBO has 7 days to report the events to the Central Data Base of Identification of Animals. The LCU only has general knowledge about the number of farms in the administrative jurisdiction regions. The No of farms in supervised 2 administrative units is about 1000, but LCU has to ask the database manager questions about the number of animals on these farms each time.

In addition, the above-mentioned private veterinarians verify the number of pigs and make corrections to the CDB.

During the time of the mission the LCU had no up-to-date data on the number of samples taken from feral pigs or pigs in 2018. The reason for this is that samples of feral pigs are sent directly to the NRL.

In addition, it is the veterinary experts who decide on the sampling and there is no annual sampling plan for ASF.

All monitoring data for pigs and feral pigs are collected ad hoc from the private veterinarians ordering the testing and from the laboratories.

Regularly LCU receives information from the rendering plant about the increase in the number of deaths of pigs.

The LCU does not have data on the feral pig population. This data is collected by the Flemish Government.

The LCU does not have a contingency plan of its own and if necessary, the instructions will be provided from the central crisis center.

Simulation exercises were organised from the central level in July 2018, but the details of these exercises were not provided.

The LCU provided information about the training of veterinarians.

Currently 50 - 100 veterinarians can take samples from animals for testing in the direction of ASF and control this account of the farm.

Additionally, the regional laboratory provides weekly information about the epidemiological situation to all private practitioners who have contracts with farms. This is done via e-mail and information on the website of the FASFC headquarters.

If there is suspicion of ASF on a farm, private veterinarian will inform the official veterinarian of the LCU. The actions in the outbreak are coordinated from the central level.

In the case of a positive result of ASF tests on the farm, the laboratory first notifies the crisis centre at the headquarters, which then notifies the private veterinarian, the LCU and the owner of the farm.

As a standard for outbreak reaction, within a radius of up to 500 m from the outbreak, farm inspections are carried out by LCU officials and between 500 m and 10 km by private veterinarians in charge of the farms.

LCU as additional important activity carry out the import controls of animals, and food.

LCU is not involved in the training of hunters and do not have regular contacts with them.

The regional laboratory and the NRL generally organise training courses for veterinarians and farmers.

The LCU was not profoundly familiar with the requirements of CID 2014/709/EU during the visit.

Visit to a pig farm

A farm with a full production cycle. 200 sows and production of about 6000 fattening pigs per year. Fattening up to 110 kg.

The last modernisation took place in 2011. The farm is partially fenced (front side). The owner plans to complete a fence for the whole farm. Pigs are kept on a concrete grid.

The owner sends pigs to one slaughterhouse (cooperative). Collection of pigs from the holding are on Sundays or Mondays. At one time about 190 pigs are delivered for slaughter. The car arrives to the farm empty.

Pigs get only dry feed produced in an external plant from its own raw material (corn, wheat). Mortality rate: 10% piglets, 2.5% weaners.

Dead animals are moved to a refrigerated container located outside of the farm. Within 24h notification of falls is reported and 1-2 times per week collection of carcasses is carried out.

Visits by a private veterinarian, who already takes care of the herd for 15 years, are performed every 2 months.

Blood samples are taken for testing every 3 months or so. In 2019, 90 blood samples were taken and 5 samples were taken from those who died in the PRRS direction. No samples were taken for the ASF yet.

The owner of pigs does not employ anyone from outside to service pigs.

Pigs are not brought from other farms to renew the population.

The owner had a good knowledge of the ASF risk in Belgium and of the symptoms and prophylaxis thereof. He also had knowledge of the presence of feral pigs in the area surrounding the holding.



Visit to a small, commercial pig holding free range.

The farm is located in Wallonia, in an area outside of any zones listed in the annex of CID 2014/709/EU.

10 sows kept in a fenced area approximately 150 m from the farm premises.

Transport of pigs by own means of transport from the place of rearing to the place of loading of the pigs to the slaughterhouse. Between 150 and 180 pigs are delivered annually to the slaughterhouse. The meat is collected from the slaughterhouse by the owners and sold together with the products in their own shop or through deliveries to customers from different parts of the country.

Pigs fed on their own uncooked feed.

They do not buy sows. A domestic boar was purchased.

Pigs are marked with a tattoo or earring.

Disinfection of the vehicle transporting pigs to the slaughterhouse before loading is carried out by the owners of the farm themselves.

The owners plan to set up a system to keep the pigs in closed buildings.

The veterinarian visits the farm every 3-4 months. Samples are taken for Aujeszky's disease and Salmonella. So far, there have been no tests for ASF.

All cases of falls are assessed by the owners.

The owners have not had a visit from an LCU veterinarian in recent years. The last scheduled visit by official veterinarian has been carried out in 2012.



Visit to Walloon Region - WB carcasses disposal, fences, traps, WB population management.

About 80% of the forests in Belgium are located in Wallonia.

WB population management in Wallonia is in the hands of local hunting associations. There is no representation of hunters at regional or national level.

The collection of carcasses, biosecurity and WB population management system is implemented at regional level.

The development and implementation of the plan was entrusted to the Directorate for Agriculture, Nature and Environment of Wallonia and the University of Liege.

Before the crisis preparations were made at regional and central level. Meetings were organised min. 1 x year.

In March 2018 the National Task Force was established.

Since March 2018, several conferences have been organised for hunters and veterinarians, including those from Luxembourg.

In June 2018 the first biosecurity training for the collection and disposal of wild boar took place. By June 2019, 5 seminars for hunters had already been organised. A total of 500 people has been trained.

The procedure for collecting fallen wild boar consists of prospection, packaging, extraction, disinfection and transport. The carcasses are packaged on site at the discovery point. This work is carried out by persons from Civil Protection.

Since October 2018 all carcasses, including those shot are transported to the special collection centre in Virton.

In collection centre the autopsies, sampling and documentation are carried out.



At the time of the GF-TADs team visit, 3 collection centres were organized.

The results of laboratory tests of WB samples are available in a very short time, i.e. 12 hours. Currently, serological tests (ELISA) of WB are carried out only within the framework of scientific research, while PCR is standard method for all samples.

Outside the infected area a group of 15 veterinarians was organized to take samples from wild boar. By mid-June 2019, 171 wild boars were tested outside the zones. All with negative results.

In infected zone hunters get 100 EU in ROZ and 50 in VZ for packaging a shot wild boar, which is then transported to a collecting centre. Found dead wild boar are managed by the Civil Protection only. No financial incentives for shooting a wild boar are foreseen yet.

There are groups of forest rangers for night shootings.

The initial zone designated by the Wallonian authorities is about 630 km² and the current zone is about 1100km².

Dead wild boars are searched by the groups of 4-8 people among 1 - 2 leaders who know the local environmental conditions. The search is conducted every week and once a month in the same area. Approximately 42 people per 2 weeks are engaged.

When a dead boar is found, it is described in detail with GPS coordinates, location, terrain characteristics and the state of decomposition according to the scale from 1 to 5 are recorded. Thereafter the carcass is wrapped and handed over by the Civil Protection to collection centre. The searched territorial sectors are marked on maps and sent with detailed data to the regional coordinator for evaluation.

The extensive system of fences is implemented to control the disease. 2 to 5 km of fences can be constructed per day. Monitoring of technical condition of fences is done daily. Fences are built in several rows at a distance of about 10 km from each other. Fences of the second and even third order are located in such a way that they form closed sectors (areas) for wild boars. According to the veterinary authorities of Wallonia, the fence greatly slows down the progression of the disease. Cases of ASF escaping from the fence were probably caused by openings in the fence, e.g. in urban areas, or failure to close the gates to the farm fields, and possible driven hunts as well.



An additional element reducing the wild boar population is the construction of traps. Currently, there are about 150 traps in operation especially around the infected zone. Traps located in areas where there is no ASF virus are the most efficient. Traps are various designs and sizes, equipped with cameras, mechanic triggers etc.



Conclusions

1. In accordance with statutory responsibilities, both risk assessment and risk management are carried out at central level and implemented by LCU.
2. Studies on strengthening farm biosecurity requirements in order to mitigate a risk of virus introduction are carried out at the central level all the time.
3. Discussions with both LCU representatives and the owner of the pig farm indicated a general knowledge of the disease and biosecurity rules. In addition, a large part of the information is available on the Agency's website.
4. The visited LCU have both a budget and adequate resources of official veterinarians to deal with an outbreak under their responsibility.
5. ASF preparedness planning procedures are currently under evaluation and being improved. In relation to the above-mentioned work, no additional simulation exercises have been organised at LCU level in recent time.

6. There is still some room for improvement at the level of preparedness of the LCU regarding the availability of pig farm data, census of pigs at farms, the resources of private veterinarians and the potential implementation of certain trade restrictions related to ASF outbreaks in pigs.
7. The system is based on close cooperation between the farm owners and the veterinarians in charge of the herd health care. In this context, the supervision does not require increased involvement of the LCU official veterinarians.
8. The chain of command and reaction in the case of an outbreak is based on the information provided by central level.
9. The pig owners visited were aware of the risk and biosecurity rules. They were well motivated to protect their herds from the disease. They mainly learned about the requirements from official website of AFSCA.
10. The cooperation between LCU in northern part of Belgium with environmental and hunting organisations is only on very basic level.
11. In southern part of Belgium the ASF control activities for the wild boar population in the infected area and in a significant part of the territory surrounding the ASF site are carried out in a professional, considered and committed manner, involving all possible institutional and personal resources. The significant improvement of the collaboration between officials and hunters has been observed by the team since last visit.
12. There are few hypotheses concerning the introduction of the virus to Belgian territory. The probable causes are from the disposal in the wild environment of the illegally brought food for personal use from infected countries to illegally imported wild boar for hunting purposes. However, the investigation is ongoing.

Recommendations

1. The Belgian CA is recommended to encourage the LCU in Flanders Region for increased activities concerning preparedness for potential ASF occurrence in the region, including gathering and evaluating of husbandry data, the requirements of some EU provisions establishing the rules for zoning and movement of pigs and products in case ASF outbreaks eg CID 2014/709.
2. The team suggests to organize at LCU level simulation exercise for ASF which can help to find potential problems in organisation of eradication of disease.
3. A review of the biosecurity status of pig farms across the country would help to assess the overall protection of the pig sector against the risk of ASF virus spreading to farms.
4. The team encourages regional level of AFSCA in the north of Belgium to initiate closer collaboration with stakeholders involved in wild animal management to review and upgrade the wild boar strategy.
5. The team recommends the Belgian CA to enhance the passive surveillance on the farm level taking into account the size of farm, age group of animals, the epidemiological situation in the region etc.
6. The only suggestion from the visiting team concerning ASF wild boar management in the southern part of Belgium is to evaluate the possibilities to establish additional incentives for hunters involved in depopulation strategy.

Final Remark

The working atmosphere during the mission was very positive. The Belgian Veterinary Authority gave all their support and assistance to facilitate the mission. The Team wishes to thank the interpreters for their support.

GF-TADs – ASF - Brussels 17-19 June

Contact information

Name	Function
Experts	
Krzysztof Jazdzewski	Polish Expert
Aleksey Igolkin	Russian expert
Ago Pärtel	Estonian expert
FASFC	
Jean-François Heymans	FASFC – Control Policy – CVO General Director ai
Jozef Hooyberghs	FASFC – Control Policy Director of Animal Health Section
Lieven Vandemeulebroecke	FASFC – Control Director of LCU East Flanders and Flemish Brabant
Valérie Louvigny	FASFC – Control Primary production expert
Fien Verhaert	FASFC – Expert Crisis prevention and management service
Anca Popa	FASFC – Control Policy Expert in the International Relations Management Department
Xavier Patigny	FASFC – Control Policy Direction Animal Health and Security of Animal Products
Valentine Clavier	FASFC – Control Policy Direction Animal Health and Security of Animal Products
Sciensano = national reference laboratory	
Nick De Regge	In charge of the Vector Disease Research Unit
Walloon Region	
Marc Herman	Nature and forestry department Inspector General, ASF Coordinator
Alain Licoppe	Nature and forestry department Expert
Annick Linden	Wildlife health surveillance and monitoring network
Flemish Region	
Bert Verbist	Agency for Nature and Forests Policy Advisor Hunting and Wildlife Management
Jim Casaer	Agency for Nature and Forests Research Group wildlife Management