The Malta African Swine Fever Experience,

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INTRODUCTION:

African Swine Fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs characterised clinically by rapid spread, high morbidity in susceptable areas. ASF is presumably the most dangereous existing pig-disease. ASF is characterised by clinical signs and gross lesions, which may be indistinguishable from classical swine fever (hog cholera), although the two causal viruses are not related.

The presence of ASF in Malta was confirmed in February 1978 and five months later the disease had spread to 60% of all Maltese farms. The outbreak was acute and with high mortality. The clinical signs were loss of appetite, incoordination, recumbancy and cyanotic areas at the abdomen and at the extremities. Vomiting and bleeding from nose and anus were characteristic findings during the Maltese epizootie.

Gross lesions were widespread haemorrages in any organ and excess fluid in abdominal, pleural and pericardial cavities. The most frequent haemorraghic lesions in the Maltese outbreak were observed in the visceral lymph nodes, in the kidneys as petechial haemorrages and on the surface of the heart.

The origin of the ASF outbreak was probably uncooked swill containing virus infected pork products.

ERADICATION:

The EEC and FAO agreed to give Malta economic and technical assistance to eradication and re-stocking. It was decided to accomplish a quick and total stamping out of all Maltese pigs. The stamping out was completed by the end of 1978 and the total number of pigs disposed of was 60,000. By doing so Malta was the first country in history to kill all species of breed in order to eradicate a notifiable disease.

The economic loss due to eradication was estimated to be 7,000,000 U.S. Dollars, which was equivalent to the amount of money the Maltese Government paid the farmers as compensation.

Immediately after the eradication, Government teams commenced a decontamination programme which included:

1. Cleaning and disinfecting of 1,600 units.
2. Pesticide treatment of units and surrounding areas.
3. Decontamination of pork stores, abattoirs, processing plants etc.,
4. Decontamination of pig herds repeated before re-stocking.

RE-STOCKING:

The restarting of the pig-production was an 800 Sow, pedigree and multiplier herd originating from England. This new unit is situated on a small and almost uninhabited Island named Comino. Before re-stocking from Comino multiplier herd the Maltese farms had to be free of pigs for more than one year and the farm had to pass a sentinel and epidemiological surveillance period of at least 100 days.

ZOO-SANITARY LEGISLATIONS AND CONTROL:

The zoo-sanitary precautionary measures and the veterinary/husbandry control is supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Malta Veterinary Services.

The precautions include:

Imports of animals and meatproducts from ASF free countries.

Incinerators to be established at airport and drydecks.

Uncooked swill feeding prohibited.

Boiled swill may be fed in fattening units.

Compulsory breeding licences.

Piggeries restricted to rural areas.

Minimum herd size of 20 sows.

Controlled pig-movements.

Hygienic upgrading of farms, abattoirs etc.,

Weekly sentinel farm visits.

Regular breeding unit visits.

Post-Mortem of dead and unthrifty pigs.

Compulsory inspection during slaughtering.

ASF - serology.

Advice about diseases, prevention and husbandry.

CONCLUSION:

The eventual outcome of the Maltese eradication and re-stocking programme should be an increased and modernized pig-production at a reduced number of farms.

The 18 months without pigs and the strengthened control minimizes the risk of ASF and any other exotic contageous pig-disease in Malta.

REFERENCES:

Wilkinson P.J. - Pig News and Information 1980 No.1.

African Swine Fever - Newsletter No.18 and 19.