

African Swine Fever Declaration

HealthforAnimals, the global animal medicines association, and our Members recognize that African swine fever (ASF) is an unprecedented crisis that threatens animal welfare along with the food security and livelihoods of people around the globe.

ASF is a particularly deadly viral disease with mortality rates up to 100%. According to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), humans cannot contract the disease, however infected pigs will die within 14 days. There is currently no cure nor an effective vaccine.

The virus itself is hardy and can survive on contaminated clothing or in infected meats for weeks, even months, allowing the disease to easily travel across borders

While ASF currently has no cure, our Members and other researchers are working to deliver a safe, effective vaccine. However, the virus is particularly complex, and development will likely take years.

Our Declaration outlines the ASF challenge and a vision for better control while we work towards a vaccine. This includes increasing biosecurity, timely outbreak reporting, leveraging trade measures like compartmentalization, and preparing regulatory systems for vaccine candidates.

HealthforAnimals Members have made clear commitments in this Declaration towards improving ASF management, collaborating with governments, and supporting biosecurity adoption.

The disease cannot be stopped by just one group or sector though, which is why the Declaration also offers clear actions policymakers can undertake to lessen the crisis and spur vaccine development.

We urge all organisations to support this declaration and work towards a world free of African swine fever.



Scope of the ASF Challenge

Last year, one-quarter of the world's pigs – approximately 300 million – were lost to African swine fever, an incurable disease present in over fifty nations.

The result: global meat production fell for the first time in twenty years and food prices jumped by 20%.^{1,2}

As the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation has warned, “the catastrophic effect of [African swine fever] on pig production, from household to commercial level, has serious socio-economic consequences and implications for food security.”³

Controlling this outbreak is a top priority for the global animal health sector.

However, African swine fever poses a uniquely difficult challenge. ASF is an especially virulent and deadly swine disease. As the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) confirms – humans cannot contract the disease, but swine will die in approximately two weeks once infected.⁴ There is no cure nor an effective vaccine.

The ASF virus can survive weeks, even months, in infected swine tissues and meats and on contaminated objects like farm equipment, vehicles and clothing.⁵

The disease may easily travel across borders through items as innocuous as unwashed clothing after a farm visit or foods brought home from a holiday.

For example, the Australian government in December 2019 reported that 50% of pork products seized at airports tested positive for ASF, up from 15% earlier in the year.^{6,7}

The disease has spread significantly in the past two years as a result with new cases emerging in previously uninfected areas of Europe and Southeast Asia.

Most notably was African swine fever's entry into China, the world's largest pork producer. According to Rabobank, 50% of Chinese pigs were subsequently lost by the end of 2019 and production could fall another 10–15% in 2020.⁸

The disease has harmed animal welfare, farmer livelihoods, and food prices in China and across the globe as a result.

There has also certainly been an impact on the environment as the widespread loss of swine means replacement livestock must be raised elsewhere to meet consumer demand, which requires the further use of natural resources.

If the disease were to spread into additional major pork producing markets such as the United States and Germany, this already unprecedented situation could become a global food security disaster.

While this viral disease currently has no cure, animal medicine companies and public sector researchers are working to develop an effective vaccine.

The complexity of African swine fever, a disease with a particularly intricate DNA structure and no known viral relatives, means vaccine R&D is exceptionally difficult, time-consuming and costly.⁹

The animal medicines sector is committed though to delivering a safe, effective vaccine that can halt this crisis and put us on a path towards global control.

However, delivering this vaccine will take time, possibly many years, and the world must take steps *now* to better control African swine fever in the meantime.

Through this declaration, HealthforAnimals and our Members offer:

- **Vision** for ASF control now as we work to deliver a vaccine in the future
- **Commitments** towards tackling this unprecedented global crisis
- **Call to action** for others to help support better control and vaccine development

African swine fever is a monumental challenge that is harming animals and affecting people around the globe. However, by working together we can lessen the burden today and work towards an ASF-free future.

African swine fever: Uniquely Complex and Virulent

- Built of a complex, double stranded DNA genome providing 150–200 proteins.¹⁰
- Only member of its virus ‘family’. There are no other known viruses like it.¹¹
- Can survive weeks, even months, in infected animal tissues and meats and on objects like farm equipment and clothing.¹²
- Considered ‘highly contagious’ by World Organisation for Animal Health.¹³
- Research must be done in sophisticated ‘Biosafety Level-3’ or higher labs.
- As a result, vaccine development will take significant time, likely years.

Our Vision

The further spread of African swine fever poses a significant risk to both animal welfare and the global food chain. Increased swine losses could constrict protein supplies and lead to further rises in prices across all commodities. The animal medicines sector is working to deliver a safe, effective vaccine to control ASF, however this will take time – likely years. It's essential that the global animal agriculture sector acts across four key areas to help stop the crisis from worsening in the meantime.

Increased Biosecurity

Until a safe, effective vaccine is available, biosecurity is our best defense against African swine fever. Biosecurity means adopting protective measures that reduce the chance of animal disease from being carried onto or off the farm by people, animals, equipment, etc.

Biosecurity measures such as quarantine, strict hygiene and adherence to proper disposal procedures alongside regulations on swill feeding and sale of sick animals can help prevent widespread outbreaks. Policymakers can encourage biosecurity uptake through increased promotion, training and funding, especially for smallholder and backyard farmers.

Closer Collaboration

As disease knows no borders, it's important for governments to collaborate through forums like the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and World Customs Union (WCU) to track and limit the spread of African swine fever in new markets.

In addition, regulators need to work with researchers early in the development process to better understand any potential vaccine candidates. This will help facilitate an efficient approval process that does not compromise safety and helps companies deliver a product that protects animals against ASF.

Reliable Outbreak Reporting

Management and control of African swine fever is only possible when it can be tracked. Reliable, transparent data sharing helps governments and global authorities better understand how the disease is spreading.

Policymakers should urge farmers to report suspected outbreaks and, where appropriate, swift compensation for lost animals can encourage compliance. Authorities should then promptly report data to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). This can help prevent entry into new regions, protect unaffected animals, and help limit the impact of ASF on the global food supply.

Continued Global Trade

Authorities can and should put measures in place such as border inspections to protect African swine fever from entering their country. However, drastic steps such as complete bans of pork products or refusal of imports from wide regions must be avoided.

Adoption of OIE measures on compartmentalization can also facilitate trade by allowing national veterinary authorities to establish zones or 'compartments' where ASF is absent and confirmed by continuous surveillance.¹⁴ Trade may continue from those zones while authorities tackle the disease in other regions.

Full control of African swine fever requires a safe effective vaccine, but this will take significant time. Action in these four areas can help protect animals and the global food supply in the coming years as our sector works towards that goal.

Our Commitments

HealthforAnimals and our Members are dedicated to helping contain African swine fever and lessen the ongoing impacts of this global crisis. We commit to working in the five areas below to help achieve this.

Research and Development

We will invest in research and development (R&D) that we hope will ultimately lead to a safe, effective vaccine for African swine fever. In the meantime, we will also invest in products that can help surveil and control ASF spread such as rapid diagnostics and biosecurity tools.

Collaborations with Public Sector

We will work with public institutions developing potential African swine fever control methods, including vaccines, to better understand their ongoing research. Where viable, individual companies may also form public-private partnerships or participate in publicly-funded research consortiums such as the Horizon 2020 DEFEND project to lend our expertise, increase knowledge of the disease and help bring potential control methods to market.

Biosecurity Promotion

We will advocate for greater adoption of biosecurity methods to limit the spread of African swine fever and urge governments

to increase training, awareness and funding for this critical defense. We will also work directly with farmers and veterinarians to improve understanding of proper biosecurity protocols that reduce the risk of disease introduction.

Regulatory Cooperation

We will meet with regulators prior to and during any product submissions to strengthen their knowledge of potential control methods. This early collaboration can facilitate fast-track approvals, which means products can more quickly reach farmers and veterinarians in ASF-endemic regions.

Awareness and Advocacy

We will work to increase knowledge of this devastating disease and the risk of continued spread. Rallying more stakeholders to action in the coming years will be essential to ASF management. We will also advocate for greater support in fighting African swine fever and improved data sharing between national governments and international institutions.

Alongside these commitments, all HealthforAnimals Members support a common goal – controlling African swine fever and safeguarding swine against this terrible disease.

Call to Action

African swine fever cannot be stopped by one group or segment of the value chain, and it requires support from both the public and private sectors. We are pleased to see governments and international institutions working tirelessly to manage African swine fever, however there are opportunities for further action in a few key areas.

Increased Research Support

We urge policymakers to increase funding available to public institutions or research consortiums working on ASF and establish any necessary regulations for disease research. Allowing researchers to swiftly obtain proper certifications and access necessary equipment is essential for vaccine development.

Public Private Partnerships

We also urge policymakers to facilitate effective public-private partnerships as technology transfer, licensing agreements, and joint research programs can spur vaccine research. Partnerships must be established quickly and efficiently in order to avoid any delays in advancing potential candidates.

Timely Data Sharing

We urge policymakers to strengthen surveillance and provide accurate, timely data on any cases of African swine fever to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Disease tracking is essential to limiting its spread into new territories and understanding how ASF is affecting animal populations.

Outbreak Preparedness

We urge policymakers to develop outbreak response plans that can be implemented if African swine fever enters their country,

including evaluating the use of OIE compartmentalization guidelines to limit trade impacts. Controlling ASF requires quick action and lost time makes control much more difficult.

Greater Biosecurity Support

We urge policymakers to increase support for farm biosecurity measures. This can include making public funding available for adoption, increased training on proper implementation, launching public awareness campaigns, etc. Biosecurity is our primary defense against African swine fever.

Vaccine Bank Commitments

We urge policymakers to consider whether vaccine bank commitments could spur increased efforts into African swine fever by providing tangible market incentives for both public and private R&D.

Fast-Track Approvals

We urge policymakers and regulators to work with researchers to better understand potential control methods and establish clear pathways for 'fast-track' approval, which can include adapted benefit/risk approaches and conditional licenses. In addition, greater detail on preferred vaccination approaches (e.g. whole farm, ring, wildlife vaccination) can help target development.

While the international community has mounted a robust response against African swine fever in recent years, action in the areas above could help limit further spread and help researchers deliver a safe, effective vaccine and other control methods.

The Path Forward

African swine fever has dramatically changed the landscape of animal agriculture. This deadly disease harms animal welfare, food security and farmer livelihoods as it spreads. ASF is an unprecedented crisis, but one that can be stopped.

The road will be long as African swine fever is a uniquely complex disease that makes prevention difficult. The animal medicines sector remains dedicated though to continued research that we hope will ultimately produce a safe, effective vaccine and other control measures.

In the meantime, the world is fighting to control African swine fever, but there are opportunities to increase efforts. More biosecurity, better data reporting, closer collaboration, clear pathways to market and more can better contain the disease as we work towards our goal.

We urge others to support this declaration and work towards a world free of African swine fever.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/17/business/china-pigs-african-swine-fever.html>
- ² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/10/16/terrible-pandemic-is-killing-pigs-around-world-us-pork-producers-fear-they-could-be-next/>
- ³ <http://www.fao.org/3/Y0510E/Y0510E02.htm>
- ⁴ <https://www.oie.int/en/animal-health-in-the-world/animal-diseases/african-swine-fever/>
- ⁵ http://www.npa-uk.org.uk/African_Swine_Fever1.html
- ⁶ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-10-15/woman-deported-for-smuggling-uncooked-pork/11603336>
- ⁷ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/australias-pork-industry-could-be-wiped-out-by-african-swine-fever/news-story/3a4d54ba4b6dfa3261b700774736fedd>
- ⁸ Rabobank. Global animal Protein Outlook 2020
- ⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5454416/>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29978065>
- ¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5454416/>
- ¹² http://www.npa-uk.org.uk/African_Swine_Fever1.html
- ¹³ <https://www.oie.int/en/animal-health-in-the-world/animal-diseases/african-swine-fever/>
- ¹⁴ See Chapter 4.4 of OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code for more detail