African swine fever: early detection is key to controlling spread

Improved surveillance, communication and collaboration are key to controlling the spread of African swine fever in Europe, according to a new risk assessment carried out by EFSA.

The assessment estimates the potential for the disease to spread across south-eastern Europe. It was requested by the European Commission to support efforts to control and prevent the spread of the disease in the region.

EFSA evaluated the possibility of spread among nine disease-free countries – Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia.[1]

The agency concludes that the chances of the disease spreading among these countries within one year of introduction are very high (66-100%). However, the chances of the disease spreading west into other EU Member States within the same time frame are rated as very low (0-15%).

Control measures – which have been in place in the EU since 2014 – should continue to focus on the importance of early detection and preparedness, EFSA says. In particular, EFSA recommends:

Rigorous surveillance, especially surveillance of wild boar and domestic pigs, which remains the most effective means for early detection of African swine fever.

Measures to limit access of wild boar to food and further reduce boar numbers through hunting.

Awareness campaigns for travellers, hunters, farmers etc. to limit the risk of spread via movement of people, as well as to assist with early detection.

Communication and collaboration among national authorities and stakeholders to support awareness campaigns.

Training activities for veterinary officers, other relevant bodies and hunters to increase the probability of early detection and effective control.

Risk assessment of African swine fever in the south-eastern countries of Europe

[1] African swine fever was detected in Serbia while EFSA’s assessment was being finalised.