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**Perceptions and attitudes of the veterinary staff about African Swine Fever and its control measures in Estonia**

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**Abstract:**

Veterinary staff are the key in fighting African Swine Fever (ASF), yet their perspectives are often unknown. This is crucial, especially in Estonia where ASF has persisted for almost 10 years in wild boar.

We conducted five focus group discussions involving a total of 15 veterinarians and veterinary technicians working in Estonian pig farms. Using participatory methods, we revealed their awareness of ASF signs, transmission routes, preventive measures, and their acceptance of control measures. Furthermore, we identified the perceived obstacles for implementing biosecurity measures on farms and perceptions of stakeholders involved in ASF control.

Veterinary staff identified haemorrhages on skin, mucosa, organs and fever as the most indicative signs of ASF, and highlighted humans, vehicles and bedding as a primary transmission concern. Training and disinfection were seen as the most effective measures for preventing ASF. The motivation and attitudes of staff and financial constraints had the greatest impact on achieving a good biosecurity measures level on farms. Pigkeepers and veterinary authority were seen as stakeholders with the most important role in ASF control and prevention. Participants placed the highest trust in themselves and pigkeepers regarding their ability to fulfill their role in ASF control. Trust in veterinary authorities was moderate, while trust in other government institutions remained low. The establishment of restricted zones (I, II, III) received the least acceptance. Overall, the herd-level control measures of ASF were more accepted than regional ones (restriction zones).

This study provides valuable insights into refining the ASF communication strategies and potential blind spots in biosecurity practices in Estonia. Potentially, the results can help to improve control in Estonia, as well as functioning as an example for other countries battling or awaiting ASF.

**Keywords:** participatory epidemiology, domestic pig, preventive and control measures, biosecurity, acceptability