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African Swine Fever Surveillance Programme

Background

African swine fever (ASF) is caused by the African swine fever virus, which affects both domestic pigs and European wild boar. The agent can also infect ticks of the genus *Ornithodoros*, which can act as a reservoir and a transmission vector. Although *Ornithodoras moubata* us known to be involved in transmission of the disease in Africa, there is currently no evidence to suggest that *Ornithodoros* ticks play a role in transmission of ASF in Europe. Disease can range from peracute to chronic. In acute cases, clinical signs may include respiratory and gastrointestinal signs; in chronic cases, non-specific signs can include intermittent fever, skin lesions, joint lesions and wasting. ASF does not affect humans and it has never been reported in Ireland.

Surveillance Design

In Ireland, ASF surveillance is carried out in accordance with the WOAH's (founded as OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code. Ireland meets the criteria for historical freedom from ASF, as set out in Chapter 15.1.4 and Chapter 1.4.6 of the code, based on a history of disease freedom and the passive surveillance system which is in place. To provide additional confidence of freedom for trading partners, Ireland also carries out active surveillance for ASF.

ASF: Passive Surveillance

Ireland regards its passive surveillance system as its mainstay in detecting incursions of exotic disease. ASF is a notifiable disease in Ireland, meaning that anyone who suspects that an animal or animal product is affected by the disease is legally obliged to notify DAFM.

In addition to disease reporting, DAFM operates a network of Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs), strategically located around the country. Farmers and private veterinary practitioners regularly submit samples to the RVLs. This provides an additional route for DAFM to detect an incursion of ASF.

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Because of the occurrence of ASF in Western Europe for the first time in recent years, the risk of an incursion of ASF into Ireland is believed to be greater than at any time in living memory, therefore farmers, vets and others need to be vigilant in preventing an outbreak. Farmers are actively encouraged to report suspicions of ASF to their local Regional Veterinary Office (RVO), and to make use of their local RVL to aid with diagnosis of disease conditions.

More detailed information on many aspects of ASF, including prevention of disease incursion and advice on early detection is available on DAFM's website: gov.ie - African Swine Fever (www.gov.ie)

ASF: Active Surveillance

Blood samples collected from cull sows in slaughter plants are tested to provide additional confidence of disease freedom. Herds which contain twenty or more sows are eligible for sampling. The upper limit for the number of samples to be taken from any one herd is twenty. All tests are carried out in the blood testing laboratory operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in Cork.

Table 1: Total number of DAFM ASF tests conducted, 2019-2022. All results were NEGATIVE for ASF antibodies and/or agent:

Year	Antibody Tests (Cull Sow Scheme)	Antibody Tests (Other)	Antigen Tests (Other)
2019	3,073	102	83
2020	2,220	203	87
2021	2,075	140	71
2022	1,595	113	49

Thanks to the Blood Testing Laboratory in Cork and to the DAFM laboratory network for data provided on numbers of tests carried out.