New Release

1st May 2024

*For immediate use*

**Quality Meat Scotland drives better safeguards against African Swine Fever**

Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) is driving efforts to safeguard Scotland's pig industry against the threat of African Swine Fever (ASF). Striving to stay ahead of this highly transmissible disease, the organisation has deployed various strategies, including participation in global consultations and the establishment of a dedicated 'Feral Pig Working Group'.

Andy McGown, QMS board member and Chief Executive of Scottish Pig Producers, recently attended the global consultation on ASF control organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome. Speaking about the significance of the initiative, Andy emphasised the urgent need for proactive measures, citing the devastating impact ASF has had on pig populations worldwide.

"Having directly and indirectly killed a quarter of the world’s pig population, ASF is the biggest animal disease outbreak ever recorded and poses a very real threat to Scotland's pig industry," Andy stated. "Our goal is to keep it out of the country, but we are also preparing for the possibility of an outbreak and working on contingency plans to minimise its impact."

Highlighting the importance of border controls, Andy expressed deep concerns over existing regulations that could potentially allow the virus to enter the UK. He stressed the need for stricter measures to prevent the introduction of ASF through commercial and personal imports of pork products.

“Border controls in the UK are woeful,” he said. “Having been delayed for seven years due to Brexit, veterinary certificates are now required for commercial imports, but they aren’t being checked. Unlike Europe, the UK still permits individuals to bring in up to 2kg of pork products for personal consumption. That is being tested and positive results show some does contain viable ASF.

“Across the world we’ve seen this virus spread primarily through wild boar accessing infected food products. It is essential that we minimise the likelihood that the wild boar and feral pigs in Scotland encounter contaminated food.”

Research indicated that the chances of ASF spreading from one infected pig farm to another is around 0.2% while the risk of an infected wild boar or feral pig spreading the disease to an outdoor farm is closer to 50%.

Alongside preventative actions, the global consultation highlighted the importance of a swift and effective response in case of an outbreak. Andy stressed the need for a coordinated approach plan involving testing, culling, and movement controls - beyond those already in place through ASF being a notifiable disease.

“Often the secondary impact of a disease outbreak is greater than the primary,” says Andy. “With foot and mouth, for example, 80% of the financial losses were through the tourism sector and wider rural economy. While I don’t think an outbreak of ASF would have the same impact on tourism businesses, the knock-on effects for the supply chain and other producers in the rest of the UK would be significant.”

In addition to participating in international efforts, QMS has taken proactive steps at the domestic level, including the formation of a 'Feral Pig Working Group'. This collaborative initiative brings together stakeholders such as land management agencies, Scottish Gamekeepers Association, deer management groups, forestry national parks and NatureScot, to address the threat posed by feral pigs as potential vectors for ASF.

“Scotland has wild boar, wild pigs and feral pigs located around the West coast, notable areas include Fort William and the Northwest Highlands as well as the Monadhliath mountains and Dumfries and Galloway,” explains Bruce McConachie, Head of Industry Development at QMS.

“Members of the Feral Pig Working Group already do a good job of mapping and controlling populations of wild and feral pigs,” he says. “We understand the population dynamics and how they move across the landscape but currently the focus is the damage they can do to ground nesting and rare birds. There is more we can learn when we consider populations through the lens of controlling ASF.”

QMS is well positioned to co-ordinate the group with its extensive experience in disease surveillance. “It is something QMS does across all the livestock sectors, but particularly in pigs,” says Bruce. “We’ve a comprehensive program of both on-farm and in abattoir monitoring, working with a variety of organisations such as SRUC, Wholesome Pigs, and across the veterinary industry. We are routinely taking samples in abattoirs checking for diseases and following-up with investigations on farm to support producers.”

"Through collaboration, we aim to enhance our understanding of feral pig populations and their role in disease transmission," he continues. "By taking proactive measures and fostering partnerships, we are working towards ensuring the resilience and sustainability of Scotland's pig industry in the face of emerging threats like ASF, all while balancing the valuable contribution and heritage of wild pigs in our natural environments and the contributions they make to biodiversity."

QMS's proactive approach to ASF control reflects its commitment to the health and welfare of Scotland's pig population. By engaging in global consultations and establishing collaborative initiatives the organisation is striving towards better safeguards for the country's pig industry.

ENDS

Words count

**Notes to editors:**

QMS is the public body responsible for promoting the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands in the UK and PGI labelled Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb branded products abroad, and for promoting Scottish pork products under the Specially Selected Pork logo.

Please note that the use of the word Scotch in the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way, traces back to the 18th century.

QMS also helps the Scottish red meat sector improve its sustainability, efficiency and profitability and maximise its contribution to Scotland's economy.

The quality assurance schemes run by QMS cover more than 90% of livestock farmed for red meat in Scotland. They offer consumers in the UK and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to some of the world’s strictest welfare standards.

Scotland’s beef, lamb and pork producers make an important contribution to the country’s economic, social and environmental sustainability, contributing over £2 billion to the annual GDP of Scotland and supporting around 50,000 jobs (many in fragile rural areas) in the farming, agricultural supply and processing sectors.

For more information visit [www.qmscotland.co.uk](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk) or follow QMS on Facebook or Twitter.