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CONTENTS

- IMS activities in animal care, focus on OIE
- Can Russia and the EU ever settle their African swine fever dispute?
- Investing in pork's future
- Save the dates: Upcoming IMS committee meetings in October

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IMS activities in animal care, focus on OIE

The International Meat Secretariat (IMS) works together with international organizations and partners along the agri-food chain, sharing expert advice with policymakers and stakeholders on a range of complex scientific, policy and regulatory issues.

The IMS cooperation agreement (since 2003) with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) covers several activities of mutual interest. The management for the health and welfare of animals, and contribution to the reduction in dangers to human health are key strategic goals.

The IMS network, working closely with the IMS Scientific Advisor, is well placed to provide practical advice on such matters as outcome-based criteria or measurables, which reflect real-world complexities in evaluating animal welfare. IMS supports the concept of "One Health", and is committed to facilitate identification of tools through technical expertise, data, and best practices.

IMS is a member of the Animal Welfare Working Group, guiding the development of 'animal welfare in livestock production systems' chapters included in the *Terrestrial Code*.

The mandate of this Working Group, which has been active from 2002-2016, will probably not be renewed (OIE World Assembly Proposal May 2017). However, OIE Council is proposing to establish "a new forum which would continue to provide the opportunity for ongoing engagement with the different organisations from the industry and the NGO sector in the development and review of animal welfare standards". This is a key development that IMS will be following closely.

The IMS Animal Care Committee meets regularly to review IMS input to OIE, as well as other international organisations with which IMS has cooperation agreements (FAO, Codex Alimentarius, and OECD). IMS has also provided important private sector input as part of the working group that developed the new ISO technical specification ISO/TS 34700:2016, *Animal welfare management - General requirements and guidance for organizations in the food supply chain*, which was published on 1 December 2016. This working group, which brought together experts from all regions of the world, included a broad range of stakeholders (private sectors, competent authorities, NGOs).

Animal care is an important topic in IMS congresses, regional meetings, and technical symposia. Increasing societal concerns related to animal care and health was key topic at the recent IMS World Meat Congress in Punta del Este, Uruguay (November 2016, more than 700 participants). The panel discussed several topical questions including:

- Who is developing and implementing animal welfare standards, and under what criteria?
- What are the strategies for assuring good welfare and health? Do they consider the differences among production systems?

- Will standards facilitate or hinder trade between companies and countries?

Livestock plays a vital role in agriculture and economies around the world. Given the diversity of livestock production systems, it is important both to have at strategy at the global level and provide solutions that work at the local level to meet the increased demands for animal proteins while ensuring food safety and quality. IMS provides a platform for members to share and exchange knowledge and network, using a fact and science based approach on several topics in addition to animal welfare, including on food safety, sustainability, and human health and nutrition. In fact, there are many interlinkages between these topics.

In summary, IMS places the highest priority on facilitating science-based exchange between the private sector and international organisations. Therefore, the OIE is a key partner for IMS activities on animal welfare.

Key upcoming OIE Reports/Events

1. The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission (the Code Commission) meets regularly to ensure that the Terrestrial Animal Health Code reflects current scientific information. The Terrestrial Code contains trade standards for terrestrial animals and their products. The Official report of the most recent meeting held on 13-24 February 2017 is available for viewing at: Code Commission Reports. The views of the Delegates of Member Countries are routinely sought through the circulation of draft and revised texts and, at each General Session, the Delegates discuss and formally adopt the draft texts as OIE standards. These texts are then incorporated in the next edition of the Terrestrial Code.

2. For IMS members in pig production, the important point to note is the proposed new chapter "Animal Welfare and Pig Production Systems" (pages 205 to 225 of this document): Pig Chapter. If your organization wishes to submit comments, either through your national government authorities or through the IMS, these need to reach OIE Headquarters by 12 July 2017 to be considered at the next Code Commission meeting (September 2017).

3. The 85th General Session of the World Assembly of OIE Delegates will be held from 21 to 26 May 2017, bringing together representatives of 180 OIE Members and observers from international organisations that have signed an official agreement with the OIE, as well as other international and regional organisations and invited guests.



The World Assembly of OIE Delegates will examine, with a view to adopting, a number of new intergovernmental standards covering animal disease control methods, including those for controlling diseases transmissible to humans, the safety of international trade in animals and animal products, as well as animal welfare. The progress of the implementation of the 6th Strategic Plan (2016-2020) will also be presented.

During the General Session, two technical items will be presented by speakers chosen for their recognized international expertise:

1- Global action to alleviate the threat of antimicrobial resistance: progress and opportunities for future activities under the 'One Health' initiative;

2- Public-Private Partnerships: expectations of private sector partners for international animal health and livestock development programmes.

Can Russia and the EU ever settle their African swine fever dispute?

African swine fever in Russian and Eastern Europe and the disputes the disease has caused between the two blocs appear to be running out of control.

Recent figures released by the Russian veterinary agency, Rosselkhoznador, show that last year there was a sharp rise in the number of cases reported on both small and large pig farm operations in Russia – rising from 45 cases in 2015 to 222 cases last year.

The total number of cases since the disease was first discovered in Russia in 2007 has reached 629 among the domestic pig population with more than a million animals slaughtered. Together with more than 440 cases reported in the wild boar population in Russia the total number of incidents rose last year to 1,112 cases in more than 40 regions since 2007.

Further cases have already been reported in the Moscow, Trans-Baikal, Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk areas this year.

However, the rise in the number of cases in Eastern Europe and the Baltic regions has been more rapid than in Russia, according to the figures from Rosselkhoznador.

The veterinary agency shows that in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia the total number of cases in both domestic pigs and wild boar has risen to about 3,000 since reporting first started in 2013.

“The deterioration of the epizootic situation of ASF in the Baltic and Eastern European countries is much more dynamic than in the Russian Federation.

“This has led to losses not only in the pig industry, but also in the economies of those disadvantaged countries and the European Union as a whole.

The official veterinary service in the EU has repeatedly stated that it has taken comprehensive and effective measures to prevent further spread of ASF, and operating in the EU Directive 2002/60 / EU adequately and professionally covered all aspects of issues related to the elimination of incidents and the prevention of the spread of infection.

“However, the current pattern of the spread of ASF in the Baltic and Eastern European countries suggests otherwise.

“Since 2011, Rosselkhoznadzor has repeatedly declared a high risk of introduction and spread of ASF virus within Europe.”

The concern is rising because a rise in cases has also been reported in other Eastern European countries including Ukraine, Belarus and most recently in recent months in Moldova.

With the Russian authorities continuing to raise concerns over the way that the EU is handling the number of incidents and the spread of the disease, a trade ban on pigs and pig meat products from the EU by Russia is being maintained.

The dispute surrounds the principle of regionalisation, which would allow trade from individual areas of a country which are recognised as pest or disease-free, even if there is a problem with the health status in the rest of the country.

It also involves the need to conduct a risk assessment based on scientific evidence.

This is despite a World Trade Organisation ruling last August and confirmed in February this year that the ban is illegal. The WTO

said that Russia's refusal to accept imports of certain EU products and to adapt EU-Russia import certificates accordingly amounts to an EU-wide import ban.

The WTO added that the measure was not based on the relevant international standards and violates the rules of the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement).

Individual Russian bans on imports from Poland, Lithuania and Estonia were also criticised by the WTO disputes panel.

However, Russia has continued to question in the WTO whether the EU's measures to contain the spread of ASF are sufficient, but the EU's response has been not to engage in a debate on the matter because it is currently the subject of an on-going dispute settlement case.

In contrast to the stance by the Russian authorities over the action taken by the EU in tackling the spread of the disease, a recent report produced for the European Food Safety Authority paints a more positive picture from an EU viewpoint. The report says that the disease, which is largely concentrated in the wild boar population in the Baltic states is spreading relatively slowly.

"The spatial analysis of ASF spread in wild boar in the EU affected countries reveals that the disease is spreading relatively slowly (between 1 and 2 km/month)," the report says.

It adds that currently, the ASF cases in wild boar in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland show the pattern of a small-scale epidemic and the apparent ASFV prevalence in wild boar showed generally a consistent pattern between countries, with more positive samples found in summer and winter.

It calls for high biosecurity standards on pig farms to be maintained and control measures in the backyard sector and at hunting grounds to be adjusted.

In the meantime, there appears that the dispute between Russia and the EU will continue in the WTO with little chance of a true settlement in sight.

Chris Harris
Agriculture and Food Journalist

Investing in pork's future

A new pork plant in Minnesota is built on automation and optimism. Prime Pork opened in Windom, Minn., in late April. As reported by the Mountain Lake Observer/Butterfield Advocate, *"To say it is a state-of-the-art operation may be an understatement . It is widely known as the most highly technical pork processing plant in the country."*

By mid-summer, when Prime expects to be operating at full capacity, the facility will employ 350 and slaughter about 6,000 hogs per day.

Prime occupies a plant that had been run as PM Beef until late 2015. Prime's renovations have included a major investment in automation, including robotic rib-pullers. The cost of the remodeling will total about US$75 million by the time everything's finished, company officials said.

Strong Fundamentals

Prime Pork exemplifies two current trends in the U.S. meat industry.

One, things are going fairly well at the moment in the pork sector. Overall, prices for hogs are holding steady, and a recent report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistic Service shows inventories of frozen pork in storage down 17 million pounds, or about 10 per cent, over the month of March. Less pork in storage can mean better retail and on-farm prices. Moreover, bone-in ham stocks during March declined 21 million pounds, the biggest March decline in 20 years.

Exports of U.S. pork are also strong. According to the U.S. Meat Export Federation, pork exports from American ports reached more than 197,000 metric tons in February, a 15 per cent increase over year-earlier totals, and value increased 17 per cent to nearly US$487 million. Combined January-February exports of U.S. pork were up 18 per cent over year-earlier totals, and value increased 22 per cent. Mexico and Japan continue to be excellent markets for American pork, and China continues to take a large volume of pork variety meats.

With good financials like these, it's not a surprise that a recent study supported by the Iowa Pork Producers Association IPPA) found that pork production in Iowa, which is one of the highest-volume pork-producing U.S. states, continues to be the strong backbone of Iowa's rural economy. IPPA estimates that in 2017, the pork industry in Iowa will contribute US$37.6 billion in sales, US$756.4 million in state and local taxes, US$1.56 billion in federal taxes, and nearly 142,000 jobs. Approximately 65 per cent of those totals are contributed by the pork slaughter-pork processing sector.

There are more than 6,200 hog farms and hog production facilities in Iowa alone, and each farm averages 3,265 hogs. Some of those hogs will wind up at the Prime Pork plant in neighboring Minnesota.

"Iowa has long been the nation's leader in swine production because of the proximity to abundant supplies of corn and soybeans, the primary components in swine feed," stated IPPA president Curtis Meier, a hog producer from Clarinda, Iowa. "We're proud of our ranking and are pleased that the industry is such a profound economic contributor to our local communities. The study shows what pork does for rural Iowa."

At a time when rural economies across the United States are struggling to keep afloat, and rural regions in every state are seeing more residents leave than remain, the strength of the pork industry in Iowa and the rest of the American Midwest emphasizes that livestock production and meat processing continue to contribute vitally to the overall economic health of the nation.

"The Customer Can Know..."

But what about the people who buy pork products?

That's the second trend Prime Pork exemplifies. More and more, American food consumers, taking a cue from their European cousins, want to know where their food comes from, how it's grown or raised, and how it's processed into the products on display at supermarkets. The trend has created a "War on Big Food," as *Fortune* magazine recently put it in a headline, meaning that the bigger a food company is, the more suspect its products and practices are. But at Prime, "The customer can know which farms the hogs came from — how they're raised, what they're fed, how they're treated," stated Glen Taylor, one of Prime's chief investors, to Minnesota Public Radio (MPR).

Taylor, a Minnesota native, knows a thing or two about marketing a good retail product that consumers appreciate. He is the majority owner of the Minnesota Timberwolves, a franchise of the National Basketball Association and also of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, Minnesota's largest daily newspaper. Ranked in the upper half

of *Forbes Magazine's* list of the 400 wealthiest Americans, Taylor made his fortune with Taylor Corp., a multinational printing and electronics company.

He told MPR that hogs processed at Prime will be tracked by producer, and the company, eyeing the export market, will not accept hogs treated with ractopamine, a growth-promoting drug banned by China, which happens to be the world's fastest growing pork market. Other practices and procedures at Prime will be adapted in response to customer reaction and demand.

"I think you listen to your customers," he said in the MPR interview. "You listen to the market."

A study last year of 5,000 U.S. food consumers by the Food Marketing Institute found that while price and quality remain stalwart factors in consumer decisions regarding food purchases, roughly half of consumer food decisions are driven by "evolving factors," including humane livestock production practices, adequate environmental protections, and fair treatment of workers. Moreover, it is young people — the consumers of tomorrow as well as today — who are most concerned about how food is produced. According to one survey, 43 per cent of surveyed "millennials" distrust large food companies.

But this is the market Prime Pork is aiming for: the consumers of today and tomorrow who live in an information age and who expect food producers to be transparent.

Steve Bjerklie, Contributing Editor, *Meat & Poultry* Magazine; correspondent, *The Economist*

Save the dates:
Upcoming IMS committee meetings in October

You are cordially invited to participate in the following IMS Committee Meetings, which will take place at IMS headquarters (5 rue Lespagnol, Paris 75020, France).

These meetings are restricted to IMS members only. There is no fee for attendance.

3-4 October 2017	Human Nutrition and Health Committee Meeting
4 October 2017	Animal Care Committee
5 October 2017	Sustainable Meat Committee

Further details on agendas for these meetings will be provided on the new IMS website, which will be launching in the next few weeks.