

Price of pork set to soar as swine fever sweeps Asia China's reluctance to admit epidemic and compensate farmers means outbreak could surpass BSE crisis - The Telegraph

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THE price of pork around the world is set to rise as a deadly virus in China and its surrounding countries has led to the culling of millions of pigs.

Experts say the African swine fever epidemic is set to have as big an impact on the global meat industry as the so-called mad cow disease of the Nineties. In China, as was the case in Britain at the height of the BSE crisis, entire herds of animals are being killed and burned or buried in an effort to contain the outbreak. Mongolia, Vietnam and Cambodia are fighting the disease, which has also been reported in wild boar in Eastern Europe and Germany.

Denmark is erecting a 43-mile long fence to keep out infected animals and customs officials have been placed on alert in Britain and across Europe. Since the virus was first reported in China in August last year, more than a million pigs have been culled and international wholesale pork prices have soared by as much as 20 per cent.

"African swine fever will be the biggest influence on global meat markets possibly for the next few years, if not a decade," said Tim Ryan, a Singapore-based market analyst. "I don't think there will be enough meat around the world available to actually fill the gap."

China is the single biggest consumer of pork in the world and now with 20 to 30 per cent of its livestock lost, it is turning to international markets to meet demand. Its pork imports, mostly from the European Union, Canada and Brazil, are expected to go up 40 per cent to 1.7 million tons this year, before increasing to 2.1 million tons in 2020.

The fever, which cannot be passed to humans, is fatal in pigs and spreads when animals consume affected meat products or come into contact with contaminated animals or materials.

As yet there is no approved vaccine against the disease although scientists, including at the Pirbright Institute in the UK, are working on one.

According to the European Commission, the average price of pork in the EU has risen about 20 per cent in the last year. Consumer prices of bacon, sausages and other pork products in the UK are expected to rise as the crisis deepens. British pork producers say stockpiling before March 29, the date the UK was due to leave the EU, has helped keep UK prices stable.

Richard Brown, an industry analyst, said that African swine fever was set to have as big an impact as BSE did.

"The Chinese eat far more pork than any other protein," he said. "A very large number of pigs are going to die because this is a native herd - they've never been exposed to this disease."

"In China, pigs are reared largely in backyards and small family farms and there is little biosecurity. The Chinese government was slow to accept they had African swine fever and because they haven't compensated farmers, people have not admitted they have it."

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