Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

GAIN Report #HK1011

Date: 3/2/2001

Hong Kong

Livestock and Products

Hong Kong's Ongoing Foot and Mouth Disease

Situation Back in the News

2001

Approved by:

Howard R. Wetzel U.S. Consulate, Hong Kong

Prepared by: Caroline Yuen

Report Highlights:

Hong Kong's media have run several stories recently about FMD in Hong Kong. FMD is not new in Hong Kong; in fact it is considered to have been endemic here for the past 50 years. An investigation by reporters suggested that the actual death toll of FMD-infected pigs may have risen far higher than numbers officially reported. While AFCD denies any worsening of the FMD situation in Hong Kong, it will likely intensify its education program for farmers and its surveillance of pig farms for the disease.

Perhaps because the UK's Foot and Mouth Disease situation has been in the news lately, Hong Kong's media have run several stories recently about FMD in Hong Kong. FMD is not new in Hong Kong; in fact it is considered to have been endemic here for the past 50 years. Nevertheless, an investigation by reporters suggested that the actual death toll of FMD-infected pigs may have risen far higher than numbers officially reported. In response, Hong Kong Government officials conducted a press conference February 28 to state their case that there is no cause for alarm and there is already a mechanism in place requiring farmers to reliably report FMD cases to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD).

Presently Hong Kong has about 300 pig farms rearing over 440,000 head of pigs. According to a local newspaper report, over 2000 pigs died of FMD in the past 3-4 months when conditions in Hong Kong were particularly favorable to transmit the disease. The report alleged that some farmers had been dumping dead animals at improper locations outside the 17 specified collection centers for diseased pigs in order to avoid paying a collection fee. Also, that some farmers were reluctant to report to AFCD out of the fear of announcing the disease and tarnishing the image of their farms.

To allay public fear, AFCD officials stressed at the press conference that there was no cause for alarm as FMD has been endemic in Hong Kong for almost 50 years and vaccines are being used on pigs to control the disease. They also pointed out that reporting of FMD incidents to the department is compulsory. Last year, FMD caused 464 deaths or 0.1% of the total pig population. AFCD believes there is no reason to suggest that the FMD situation has become any more serious in Hong Kong than in the recent past, based on the following reported cases of FMD in swine during the last 3 years:

Year	Number of Outbreaks	Animals Involved	Number of Deaths
2000	17	2,152	464
1999	9	3,320	340
1998	14	11,662	1,705

Source: Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department

The figures do not suggest any significant increase in the level of FMD cases in Hong Kong and certainly the disease is not new here. However, pig farming in Hong Kong is very dense so the spread of disease can be fast. AFCD officials also acknowledged that some farmers do not have their pigs vaccinated against the FMD because of the HK\$5 cost for each pig.

While the mechanism of compulsory reporting of FMD is in place, AFCD will probably toughen up its enforcement measures to improve reporting. Equally important to the control of FMD is educating pig farmers as to how to avoid and handle the disease through vaccination and farm hygiene practices. While AFCD denies any worsening of the FMD situation in Hong Kong, it will likely intensify its education program for farmers and its surveillance of pig farms for the disease.