

A Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Foreign Animal Disease: The African Swine Fever Executive Management Board



African swine fever (ASF) is a viral disease of all swine species that has been spreading internationally at an alarming rate since 2018. It has been reported in 25 countries including China, many countries in Asia, many European countries, and more recently in the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. To date this virus has never been detected in North America. ASF has a near 100% case fatality rate and there is currently no commercially licensed vaccine. If ASF is detected in North America, all international trade of live hogs and pork products will stop immediately. While specific outbreak scenarios differ, it is generally agreed that detection of ASF will cause disruption throughout the pork value chain with unprecedented and unpredictable impacts. This case study brings together stories from interviews with Christa Arsenault, the National ASF Coordinator, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), and a previous case study shared by the Animal Health Canada (AHC) working group.

ASF Executive Management Board

The African Swine Fever Executive Management Board (EMB) was launched in 2019 and has since helped to promote a stronger industry-government national approach for foreign animal disease planning. The ASF EMB was initially brought together to develop and action the [Pan-Canadian ASF Action Plan](#). Christa Arsenault acted as the National ASF Coordinator with the ASF EMB for a 1-year term in 2021. Her role included the difficult task of coordinating different federal, provincial, territorial, and industry organizations to work together to create an action plan for ASF in Canada. While this has been a challenge, Christa noted that she has improved access to documents and made information available to those who need it, encouraged communication and information sharing across the industry, and championed action across a number of critical pillars, including enhanced biosecurity-prevention, preparedness planning, ensuring business continuity, and coordinated risk communications.

Key Successes & Lessons Learned

A key success of the ASF EMB has been learning how organizations can work together in the event of an ASF response being needed. Through routine networking, plans have been created from group discussion. These conversations have allowed for understanding the differences in knowledge that exist for those involved and their individual roles and responsibilities. The ASF EMB has greatly helped with information sharing, relationship-building, and coordination on priorities and national-level activities defined in the Action Plan. Within the ASF EMB, all stakeholders have shown an increasing level of transparency leading to the clarification of roles and responsibilities around ASF.

Interviews with members from the CFIA revealed how ASF preparedness has been a top priority for the organization over the last three years. Through this preparation, all involved organizations learned about the complexity of animal emergency disease management, which led to increased awareness and structural changes throughout the swine industry. While the thought of an ASF outbreak in Canada can be overwhelming, the preparation for this event has led to all provincial industry and government groups knowing that they have to prepare, what their roles will be, the importance of collaboration, and why accepting responsibility and commands from higher levels in industry is crucial. The close and consistent engagement of various levels of federal, provincial, territorial government, and industry stakeholders on the ASF file across Canada has enhanced communications, flagged key gaps to preparedness and response, and stimulated collaborative action towards a more robust emergency management plan for ASF incursion.

Looking Forward

Although major strides have been made in regard to preparing for the potential occurrence of ASF, work must still continue in this area to address gaps within industry collaboration. Looking forward, the ASF EMB still has work to do in areas of accountability, implementation, identifying resources, representation of all affected stakeholders, and communication across all groups.