

News & Reports

Outrage at treatment of pigs in China

By Josh Loeb

PIGS may still be being buried or burnt alive in China as part of efforts to control African swine fever (ASF), animal welfare campaigners fear.

Footage appearing to show thousands of pigs packed into lorries being dumped into deep pits and covered in earth or set alight while still alive has prompted horror and calls for international efforts to help the country deal humanely with the epidemic.

Animal welfare groups have catalogued apparent cases of gross welfare breaches, although the precise provenance of the videos is unknown.

They appear to have been filmed by several different groups either in late 2018 or early this year and have been circulating around the world via instant messaging apps and on social media, drawing widespread condemnation.

Richard Pearson, a UK vet and president of the Pig Veterinary Society (PVS), told *Vet Record*: 'This is unverified footage that does appear to show absolutely appalling treatment of pigs that we, as PVS, wholeheartedly condemn.'

'These scenes are not representative of UK or European standards of animal welfare, even in the presence of a notifiable disease such as ASF, which remains a very significant risk to the UK pig herd. We must do all in our power to stop its introduction here.'

Peter Stevenson, chief scientific adviser to the charity Compassion in World Farming, said he had been sent separate footage last month from an animal welfare organisation.

'It was like the other footage I have seen, just the number of animals was so much greater,' he said. 'We don't know when it was filmed, so we don't know whether

this practice is still continuing. I fear it may be.

'We don't know if they've stopped doing this [the live burials] or that they've just become better at making sure it doesn't get out.'

The Chinese Embassy in London did not reply to a request for comment from *Vet Record*.

However, Shujin Wang, a PhD student at Maastricht University in the Netherlands who has researched ASF outbreaks, said live burials constituted 'improper ways to deal with pigs and are not allowed as per the animal welfare laws and associated laws in China'.

Pigs designated for culling in China should be electrocuted and then either burnt in a government-appointed location or disposed of using caustic soda, Wang said.

In his view the videos showed the activities of rogue 'backyard farmers' in defiance of Chinese government regulations. However, they appear to show many thousands of pigs being killed in this way.

Wang also said he believed the farmers involved had already been arrested and fined or detained by the authorities.

Shao-Lun Zhai, an associate professor at the Guangdong Academy of Agricultural Sciences Institute of Animal Health, suggested there was a problem with a lack of appropriate equipment or enough facilities to kill such large numbers of pigs humanely.

A lack of appropriate electric shock equipment might lead some people to 'overlook' animal welfare regulations, Zhai said.

He added: 'I hope that some



Stills from the footage circulating on social media

**“
We don't
know if
China has
stopped
doing this
or that it
has just
become
better at
making sure
it doesn't
get out**”

foreign advanced equipment will be introduced into China to improve animal welfare and reduce animal suffering.'

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), which last week held its annual 'World Assembly' gathering in France, is understood to be advising China on how best to deal with the epidemic.

The event included the presentation of a report entitled 'Strategic challenges to global control of African swine fever', after which the World Assembly called on countries to consider ASF control as a high priority.

The OIE says it has also committed to implement a global initiative to better support countries in their control of the disease.

A petition addressed to the Dutch minister of foreign affairs was launched this week by Varkens in Nood (translated as 'Pigs in Need'), an animal welfare group based in Amsterdam.

It is demanding that the cull in China happens only in accordance with OIE standards and wants international veterinary or welfare observers to be allowed into the country to monitor the situation.

An example of a video can be found on YouTube at: <http://bit.ly/2W9OMdv> ●