

Getting to the root of delays in reporting African swine fever suspected cases

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Context

- France is currently at a high risk of African swine fever (ASF) incursion from Italy.
- The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (AuRA) region is an important communications hub between Italy, Switzerland and France. In 2021, almost 1.5 million lorries and heavy goods vehicles travelled between Italy and France through the Mont-Blanc and Fréjus tunnels alone.
- The AuRA region has a large population of wild boar and present a small but diverse pig production industry, with a significant population of outdoor pigs. With such of influx of vehicles moving in and out, the AuRA region is at a high risk of incursion of ASF.
- Surveillance of animal health events is key to best response to disease incursion.
- In France, passive surveillance procedures are put in place to detect suspect cases in both domestic and wild populations, with hunters and pig farmers (Level 1) required to immediately report any suspected cases of ASF in their herd and any dead wild boar found in forest to their vets and local hunting organisations (Level 2). These latter will then report to local animal health authorities (Level 3) to initiate confirmation and control procedures.
- Consequently, efficiency and efficacy of surveillance system is highly dependent on how suspected cases are reported by both hunters and pig farmers (Level 1).
- However, it is not yet clear how official recommendations and reporting procedures given by actors from Levels 2 and 3 are perceived by farmers and hunters and what challenges may exist to their implementation.

Objectives

- Explore cultural, social, economic factors that may delay reporting suspected cases of ASF in the AuRA region.

Methods

- We recruited first respondents from Levels 2 and 3 of the surveillance system that were easily identified online, then a snowball sampling technique was implemented to recruit Level 1 respondents and complemented it through professional and interest groups on social media (Facebook).
- For each respondent, a semi-structured in-depth interview was carried out, recorded and transcribed.

Respondents' characteristics



28 interviews



Interviews lasted on average 64 minutes (32 to 105 minutes)



22 interviews from Level 1, 5 from Level 2 and 1 from Level 1



11 hunters and 11 farmers (both extensive and intensive)



6 women

Results

- Overall, both farmers and hunters show some willingness to report suspected ASF cases due to concerns about disease transmission and its potential repercussions.

No, at least not for me, because I won't hide anything, because afterwards, there's a risk that I might spread it, since I sell piglets, and then the risk of letting it spread around. (Organic outdoor farmer, woman from Isère)

Even the [...] cooperative has absolutely no interest in hiding things, and it would be too dangerous to risk contaminating other sectors by concealing anything. Besides, if you do that behind the scenes, you lose your credibility. (Intensive farmer, man from Puy-de-Dôme)

Honestly, no hunter would have an interest in hiding African swine fever. That's something that seems really unlikely to me. (Hunter, man from Loire)

- Hunters' and farmers' attitude and knowledge on the reporting of ASF suspected cases are shaped by their social context and their engagement with (and trust of) wildlife and farming organizations (Level 2).
- Challenges are diverse but show some overlaps between hunters and farmers.



Limited knowledge about ASF and its reporting procedures

Lack of community identity and collective responsibility

Fear of the social, legal and economic consequences of reporting

Fatalistic attitude toward disease consequences and risk



Conflicts between the time-consuming administrative burden of reporting and their leisure activity

Conclusions

- Both farmers and hunters possess a willingness to report suspected ASF cases, but face challenges rooted in a conflict between animal health authorities' conception of diseases threats and farmers/hunters' relation with nature and their activities.

- It is critical to account for the social constraints and challenges faced by field actors when designing surveillance protocols to ensure their engagement.