

Premier views pig fever measure

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Premier William Lai, second right, speaks at a pig farm in Taichung's Cingshuei District yesterday.

Photo: Ou Su-mei, Taipei Times

Premier William Lai (賴清德) yesterday inspected the disposal of leftover pig food at a hog farm in Taichung and called on farmers and all Taiwanese to join hands to guard against African swine fever.

The government has been stepping up measures against the disease since China reported its first infection in August and illegal Chinese pork imports continue to be intercepted by customs officials.

Following President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) visit to Yunlin County hog farms on Saturday, Lai yesterday visited Rueising livestock farm in Cingshuei District (清水) to inspect processes meant to reduce the chances of infection.

When foot-and-mouth disease reached Taiwan in 1997, the nation suffered economic losses exceeding NT\$170 billion (US\$5.5 billion at today's exchange rate) and culled more than 4 million pigs, leaving a scar on the domestic hog industry, Lai said.

If African swine fever enters the nation, its impact might be more severe than foot-and-mouth disease, given that it can be transmitted in numerous ways and survive in frozen pork for up to 1,000 days and in refrigerated pork for 100 days, he said.

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Without a vaccine or cure available, the disease might ruin the domestic hog industry, which has an annual revenue of more than NT\$200 billion, Council of Agriculture (COA) Deputy Minister Lee Tui-chih (李進德) said, calling on people to protect the famous Taiwanese dish rice with braised pork and other pork dishes.

“Disease prevention should be considered a battle,” and every single livestock farm is like a castle defending the front line, Lai said.

Many Taiwanese work on pig farms in China, so they might carry the virus into the nation, he said, urging farmers to maintain required quarantine measures and control the movement of personnel, vehicles and equipment on farms.

Food is one of the virus’ main transmission channels, but it can be eradicated if leftovers are heated to 90°C for one hour before being fed to pigs, he said.

Farmers without heating devices can use fodder instead of leftovers and the government would provide subsidies for such a switch, Lai said.

The nation has 2,045 hog farms that use leftovers to feed pigs, while the council is helping 67 farms without heating devices to switch to fodder, COA Acting Minister Chen Chi-chung (陳其南) said on Saturday while accompanying Tsai in Yunlin.

Lai asked local governments to set up standard procedures for burying pigs in preparation for the possible arrival of the disease.

The number of dead pigs might exceed the total capacity of incinerators and disposal firms, he said.

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Additional reporting by CNA

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