

COA circumspect as hog farms call for leftover ban

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A sniffer dog yesterday checks a passenger at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport as part of efforts to prevent African swine fever from entering Taiwan.

Photo: CNA

The Council of Agriculture (COA) yesterday said it would not ban the use of kitchen waste as pig feed, despite increasing calls from hog farmers and experts for a ban to prevent the transmission of African swine fever.

More than 280 hog farmers on Friday in a joint statement called on the council to prohibit feeding pigs leftovers.

Using leftovers to feed pigs is a backward practice and provides a hotbed for virus transmission, they said, urging the council to protect and upgrade the hog industry.

Instead of imposing an immediate ban, the council is encouraging farmers to switch to commercial fodder by providing subsidies and technical assistance, COA Chief Secretary Chang Chih-sheng (張志生) told a news conference in Taipei.

The council last year identified 2,045 hog farms using leftovers as pig feed, but that number has fallen to 1,776 after the rest had switched to commercial fodder by yesterday, Chang said.

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Leftovers are just one channel for virus transmission and the risk can be minimized by heating leftovers to 90°C for at least an hour, as they are required to do, Department of Animal Industry Deputy Director Wang Chung-shu (王仲書) said.

The council next week would meet with experts and local representatives to further discuss the matter, he added.

Taiwan produced about 970,000 tonnes of leftovers in 2017, of which 770,000 tonnes were used as pig feed, Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) Bureau of Environmental Inspection Deputy Inspector-General Lin Jso-hsiang (林俊祥) said.

If feeding kitchen waste to pigs were banned, restaurants and hotels producing more than 16kg of leftovers per day would need to contract firms to process them at disposal fees of NT\$2,000 to NT\$3,000 (US\$64.80 to US\$97.20) per tonne, he said.

The nearly 200 firms nationwide that produce more than 1 tonne of leftovers per day are advised to install their own fast-fermenting devices, Lin said, adding that the agency would meet with such businesses next week.

Yunlin County Commissioner Chang Li-shan (常立山) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) on Dec. 25 announced a ban on using leftovers as pig feed, making it the first municipality to do so.

The move drew criticism from Premier William Lai (賴清德).

The county produces about 90 tonnes of leftovers every day, which are now sent to local plants for disposal, including Nan Ya Plastics Corp's recycling plant, Yunlin Environmental Protection Bureau Director Chang Chiao-wei (常巧威) said via telephone yesterday.

The central government should fully support the county's plan to do so and follow suit by

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announcing a national ban, he said, asking whether the central government would be ready to tackle all leftovers if the disease enters the nation.

Meanwhile, customs officials had as of Friday intercepted 127 illegal imports of meat products, including 44 pork products from China, since Dec. 18, when it raised fines for first-time offenders to NT\$200,000 and repeat offenders to NT\$1 million, council data showed.

Chunghwa Post Co yesterday reminded people not to import any meat products from overseas, not to order foreign meat products by mail and not to visit foreign farms.

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