

## No invite to swine fever meeting

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Pigs are seen in a holding pen at a New Taipei City pig farm on March 3 during a visit to the farm by staff from the African Swine Fever New Taipei City Disaster Response Center.

**Photo: Chen Hsin-yu, Taipei Times**

Taiwan has not yet received an invitation to the World Organisation for Animal Health's (OIE) regional conference on African swine fever that is to take place in Beijing on Monday, but Vietnam is seeking the nation's help in testing the virus, the Council of Agriculture said yesterday.

The highly contagious disease has not been found in Taiwan, but the government has been implementing preventive measures since China first reported an outbreak on Aug. 3 last year, followed by Vietnam on Feb. 20 and Cambodia on Wednesday.

Although Taiwan is an OIE member, China, as the conference's host nation can decide which nations to invite, council Deputy Minister Huang Chin-cheng (黃錦成) said.

The council on Wednesday wrote to the OIE to request permission to participate, but has not yet received a response, he said, adding that it is no stranger to Beijing's "petty actions."

If Taiwan receives an invitation at the last moment, officials have made related preparations, including a list of non-governmental and official attendees, Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine Director-General Feng Hai-tung (馮海東) said.

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Information exchange at the conference is important, as Taiwan can learn from other nations that have reported outbreaks to make early preparations in the event that the disease enters Taiwan, he said.

Even if the nation is barred from the meeting, it would still join the OIE's annual conference scheduled for next month in Paris, Feng said.

It is not clear how much information Beijing would share at Monday's meeting, so it would not be that regrettable if Taiwan could not attend, Huang said.

The council has been collecting information about the disease through Taiwanese businesspeople and other channels, and learned of possible outbreaks in Vietnam and Cambodia prior to their official reports to the OIE, he said.

The council on Feb. 20 listed Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand as high-risk areas for African swine fever, meaning that all carry-on luggage from the areas must undergo X-ray scanning at customs.

People caught illegally carrying pork products from areas infected with the disease within the past three years would face a fine of NT\$200,000 (US\$6,490) for the first offense and NT\$1 million for repeated offenses, it said, adding that visitors who fail to pay the fines at customs would be denied entry.

The Vietnamese government last month asked Taiwan to share techniques for testing antibodies in pigs infected with African swine fever, showing that it has more confidence in Taiwan than in China for tackling diseases, Huang said.

The council is glad to offer help, but the collaboration should be further negotiated through foreign affairs channels due to the costs involved, he added.

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