

African Swine Fever Outbreak Detection and Response Simulation Exercise

Gelephu, Sarpang, Bhutan - February 5th to 8th, 2024

The National Centre for Animal Health (NCAH) under the of the Department of Livestock (DoL), Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL), has achieved a significant milestone in Bhutan's fight against African Swine Fever (ASF) with the successful execution of a 4-day Simulation Exercise on ASF Outbreak Detection and Response. Held from February 5th to 8th, 2024, in Gelephu, Sarpang, this exercise serves as a pivotal initiative to evaluate the efficacy of the recently revised National ASF Prevention and Control Plan 2024 (NASFPCP, Second Edition) while bolstering the capabilities of technical field officials in combating ASF outbreaks.



Workshop Banner



PPE donning & doffing exercise

ASF, having initially emerged among domestic pig populations in Bhutan in April 2022, has posed formidable challenges to the nation's agriculture sector, particularly affecting districts bordering India. The resultant outbreaks (n=18), spanning from November 2022 to August 2023, had a significant socio-economic impact on pig-rearing communities, necessitating a substantial governmental expenditure exceeding Nu. 35.5 million towards response efforts.

In response to these challenges, the Department, in collaboration with key stakeholders, embarked on a comprehensive review of the National ASF Prevention and Control Plan (NASFPCP), guided by valuable feedback from field professionals and insights from the Food and Agriculture Organization's Emergency Management Centre (FAO EMC) mission in Bhutan. The culmination of this endeavor was the development of the revised National ASF Prevention and Control Plan (NASFPCP, Second Edition), aimed at fortifying prevention and containment strategies.

The simulation exercise, conducted as part of the Emergency Technical Cooperation Programme (eTCP) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), witnessed the active participation of 64 representatives from various governmental agencies and organizations, including the Department of Livestock, Bhutan Food and Drug Authority, Department of Forests and Park Services, Royal Bhutan Police, and the FAO Country Office.

The exercise comprised a blend of tabletop (30 %) and field (70 %) activities, commencing with sensitization sessions on ASF prevention and control strategies and practical demonstrations of personal protective equipment (PPE), sampling and decontamination protocols. Subsequent field simulations encompassed critical response measures, including disease outbreak investigation, risk assessments, depopulation, disposal, decontamination (3-D), surveillance, quarantine, movement control, and other ancillary activities. Participants were thoroughly acquainted with the incident command structure of ASF outbreak response, elucidating the roles and responsibilities of various rapid response teams (RRTs).

Simulation Exercise in Action



The closing ceremony of the simulation exercise was graced by the presence of Honourable Dasho Dzungda of Sarpang Dzongkhag, alongside other dignitaries from the Dzongkhag. Honourable Dasho emphasized the critical importance of such capacity-building exercises in preventing the incursion of diseases like ASF and swiftly detecting and controlling outbreaks at their source.

Looking ahead, the insights gathered from this simulation exercise will inform further refinement, compilation, consultation, and endorsement of the NASFPCP by the Ministry, ensuring a robust and coordinated approach to ASF prevention and control in Bhutan.

The workshop was financed through the fund approved for the FAO eTCP, “Emergency technical assistance to minimize risks and impacts of African Swine Fever (ASF) in Bhutan” which underscores the international community's commitment to supporting Bhutan in mitigating the risks and impacts of ASF, thereby safeguarding the nation's agricultural sector and public health.

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