LinkTADs

D7.5 – Short Term Visit Programme Report

This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement No: 613804

Project no.: 613804

Project acronym: LinkTADs

Project title: Linking Epidemiology and Laboratory Research on Transboundary Animal Diseases and Zoonoses in China and EU

Instrument:

KBBE.2013.1.3-04: Coordination of research between EU and China on major infectious diseases of animals and zoonoses

D7.5
(Short Term Visit Programme Report)

Due date of deliverable: Month 26

Start date of project: November 1st 2013 Duration: 3 years

Organisation name of lead contractor for this deliverable: (**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - FAO**) (Partner #1)

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Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Seventh Framework Programme (2007-2013)		
Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	**X**
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

History			
Version	**Date**	**Reason**	**Revised by**
01	20/10/2015	Minor revisions	Shuo Li (FAO), Zhai Xinyan (CADC), Kang Jingli (CAHEC) and Dong Xin (SPI)
02	4/11/2015	Official clearance process	PMC

Partnership

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Animal Production and Health Section

Joint FAO/IAEA Programme for Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture

Europa Media Non-profit Ltd.

Royal Veterinary College

Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement.

National Veterinary Institute

Shanghai Veterinary Research Institute

Harbin Veterinary Research Institute

China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center

China Animal Disease Control Center

Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação

Huazhong Agricultural University

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01.

Introduction

Introduction

Task 7.1 (short-term academic visits) aims to bring together interested European and Chinese scholars, researchers and other stakeholders identified in the project. Four short-term academic visits will be organized under LinkTADs framework between EU member states and China in order to deepen the knowledge about each other´s organisations, regarding aspects such as research interests, conditions and goals. The short-term visits will serve as bases for establishing further collaboration activities.

Between the 2nd and 7th of August, two representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO: Daniel Beltrán-Alcrudo and Shuo Li) visited the following institutes (and LinkTADs partners) under the LinkTADs short-term visit programme:

- China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center (CAHEC) in Qingdao (China);
- China Animal Disease Control Center (CADC) in Beijing (China).

In addition, two side vitis took place to:

- Veterinary Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture in Beijing (China), whihc is part of LinkTADs' Advisory Board;
- Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação (SPI) in Beijing (China), also a LinkTADs partner

Daniel Beltrán-Alcrudo is the coordinator of LinkTADs project. He is a veterinary epidemiologist by training, who acts as a focal point for African swine fever (ASF) within FAO. As such, he is involved in a number of ASF-focused initiatives.

Shuo Li, LinkTADs representative at both FAO ECTAD China and CADC, organized and facilitated the visits in Qingdao and Beijing.

The specific objectives of the short-term visit were all related to ASF:

- To discuss the current ASF status, ongoing ASF global initiatives and potential collaborations;
- To discuss the ASF Contingency Plan currently being finalized for China;
- To discuss the participation at the coming progress meeting, WP4 and WP5 meetings in Vienna;
- To discuss on-going and future activities of LinkTADs with the Advisory Board member at the Veterinary Bureau.

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02.

Background

Background

ASF is one of the most severe and highly contagious viral infections of domestic pigs and wild boars. ASF was restricted to Africa, except for the Italian island of Sardinia, until 2007, when it was reported in Georgia, after being introduced via waste from a ship that had sailed from South-East Africa. It quickly spread across the Caucasus and the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine following trade routes, and eventually reaching the European Union in 2014. The main paths of introduction and further spread of ASF are through informal movements of contaminated pork products, transported for personal consumption or smuggled for trade purposes. In the absence of a vaccine to prevent the disease, the only options available are strict controls of animal and pork movements into the country (particularly informal ones), ensuring preparedness at all levels in the event of an incursion, improving biosecurity measures and raising public awareness.

The risk of ASF entering Asia is the highest ever, and China is of particular concern since the country houses almost half of the worldwide pig population. China is the biggest importer of pork and over the past few years has developed very strong links with ASF-infected countries in Africa. China also shares a border with the ASF-endemic Russian Federation. Since China, and Asia in general, have never encountered ASF, the region is ill-prepared for an eventual incursion of ASF in terms of policy and capacity. With China relying heavily on the pork production industry and owning almost half the world's domestic pig population, an incursion of ASF would have a catastrophic impact on trade and pig production, with serious implications for global food security.

The risk of the disease being introduced from Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe is increasing. The Chinese government has banned the legal import of pigs or pig products from ASF-infected countries, however a large number of informal movements of potentially contaminated pork and other pig products occur through smuggling, inadequate disposal of ship/airline waste, and in travellers' luggage. The ASF virus survives long periods of time in meat and can eventually end up as swill feed for domestic pigs or garbage to which scavenging pigs or wild boars have access.

Human movement between China and ASF-infected countries has increased hugely for two reasons connected to globalization: i) China provides massive labour forces to African development interventions, where the disease is endemic; and ii) it now has the highest number of tourists travelling overseas and returning to China, therefore increasing the risk of importing contaminated meat.

In the event of an incursion of ASF in China, the control of the disease would be further complicated by two facts: i) the largest percentage of national pork output comes from small backyard production systems with low biosecurity measures; ii) the well-developed highway system allows for rapid movement of pigs from one province to another. A further knock-on effect of the disease spreading into neighbouring countries in Asia would pose a severe economic challenge to the world.

In order to address this imminent threat, an African Swine Fever Policy Event was organized within LinkTADs. The workshop, organized under WP5 (Task 5.2), brought together 40 experts from the EU and Asia met in Beijing on 24 November to explore how lessons learned in Europe fighting ASF could be applied to Asia, to identify the main policy gaps in East and Southeast Asia and ultimately to develop a set of recommendations and a follow-up strategy for ASF policy in the region. To address the policy gap and build ASF preparedness, LinkTADs brought together: i) Policy makers from China; ii) Veterinary Services from Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam; iii) ASF epidemiology and diagnosis experts from the EU, FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and; iv) Representatives from the EU and the United States of America. Policy challenges highlighted during the round table discussions included: i) the lack of ASF-specific contingency plans (and other animal health plans) in most countries; ii) the challenges presented by the large proportion of backyard pig production; iii) the lack of knowledge and health management related to wild boar populations; iv) the region's porous borders that would hardly prevent ASF from spreading; and v) the diagnostic dilemma: how to detect ASF in a region with many similar-looking and endemic swine diseases (e.g. classical swine fever). Participants endorsed 11 cross-cutting recommendations for immediate action to build preparedness and improve ASF policy making, including increasing communication and awareness conducting risk assessments, ensuring training, assessing policies, addressing backyard, low-biosecurity and wild boar issues, linking with other swine disease efforts, collaborating with forestry authorities and hunters and mobilizing additional resources.

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Visit to the China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center

Visit to the China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center

Daniel Beltrán-Alcrudo gave a 3-hour talk at the premises of CAHEC in Qingdao, covering the current status of ASF, the main risk factors for China and the major international initiatives on ASF. Given the current status of ASF, with the disease spreading steadily despite all efforts in Africa and Europe, there are many national and international initiatives to create awareness, build capacity, coordinate efforts and, in general, to assist countries affected or at risk. FAO has a particularly active role in most of these efforts, which include activities in the following fields:

1. Coordination and Global Initiatives: The FAO-lead Global platform for ASF and other important diseases of swine aims to coordinate all stakeholders involved in the prevention and control of the disease. Similarly, the Global ASF Research Alliance (GARA) focuses specifically on the coordination of research. ASF Regional Sub-Networks, together with *Ad hoc* coordination meetings, can be very valuable to coordinate at the sub-regional level. These are best exemplified by the Standing Group of Experts (SGE) on ASF in the Baltic and Eastern Europe Region (SGE) and the Eastern Africa ASF Working Group (EA-ASF-WG). Finally, the ASF Strategy for Africa developed by FAO, AU-IBAR and ILRI will help to progressively control and eradicate the disease when feasible.
2. Emergency & Assessment missions, mainly those conducted by the Crisis Management Center for Animal Health (CMC-AH) of FAO to Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire, and by EMPRES to Ukraine. These 1-2 week missions aim to rapidly assess the situation and identify gaps and steps forward in countries facing an ASF emergency.
3. Technical Cooperation Program (TCPs) projects are a very useful tool to assist countries over 1-2 years to fill the most immediate gaps in the control of ASF. There are ongoing TCPs in Belarus, Ukraine and China, and others recently finalized in Georgia, Armenia and Cape Verde.
4. Capacity building trainings and workshops on laboratory diagnosis, field activities, epidemiology and tick collection and identification. These may be part of TCPs or *Ad hoc*.
5. FAO Publications: primarily the regular updates and early warning messages (EMPRES Watch, EMPRES Bulletin and Focus on) as well as manuals (on pig biosecurity, development of ASF contingency plans or the diagnosis of ASF).
6. Research, such as the EC-funded consortium ASFORCE, as well as IAEA's Coordinated Research Project (CRP) for Early and Rapid Diagnosis and Control of ASF.

7. ASF Reference Centers, which can assist countries on epidemiology, laboratory and other technical aspects.

The talk was followed by discussions with Dr Wang Zhiliang (Deputy Director and CVO of CAHEC) and his team, referring mostly to technical aspects of the ASF Contingency Plan for China. Also the issue of wild boar surveillance and control was of great concern. In addition, areas of collaboration were identified, mostly based on a concept note prepared at a LinkTADs WP3 workshop in April 2015, which identified the major gaps, activities and potential partners. In addition, the FAO officers had an opportunity to learn more about CAHEC activities, role and responsibilities.

The FAO officers also met Dr Wang Youming (Director of the Division of Epidemiological Survey), Ms Liu Ailing and Dr Zhang Yi to discuss LinkTADs activities. The main issue discussed was CAHEC's participation in the up-coming progress meeting (PM) in Vienna in October 2015.

Both Dr Wang Zhiliang and Dr Wang Youming expressed their interest in becoming FAO Reference Centres for epidemiology. They have started preparing the documentation to get the internal approval, but they would still need additional information and advice on the process.

Ever since the visit:

- FAO has explored the status of CAHEC for becoming a FAO Reference Centre for epidemiology. The paperwork still needs to be endorsed and submitted to FAO by Chinese authorities.
- An email exchange has continued in order to clarify specific aspects and technical issues related to the ASF Contingency Plan.

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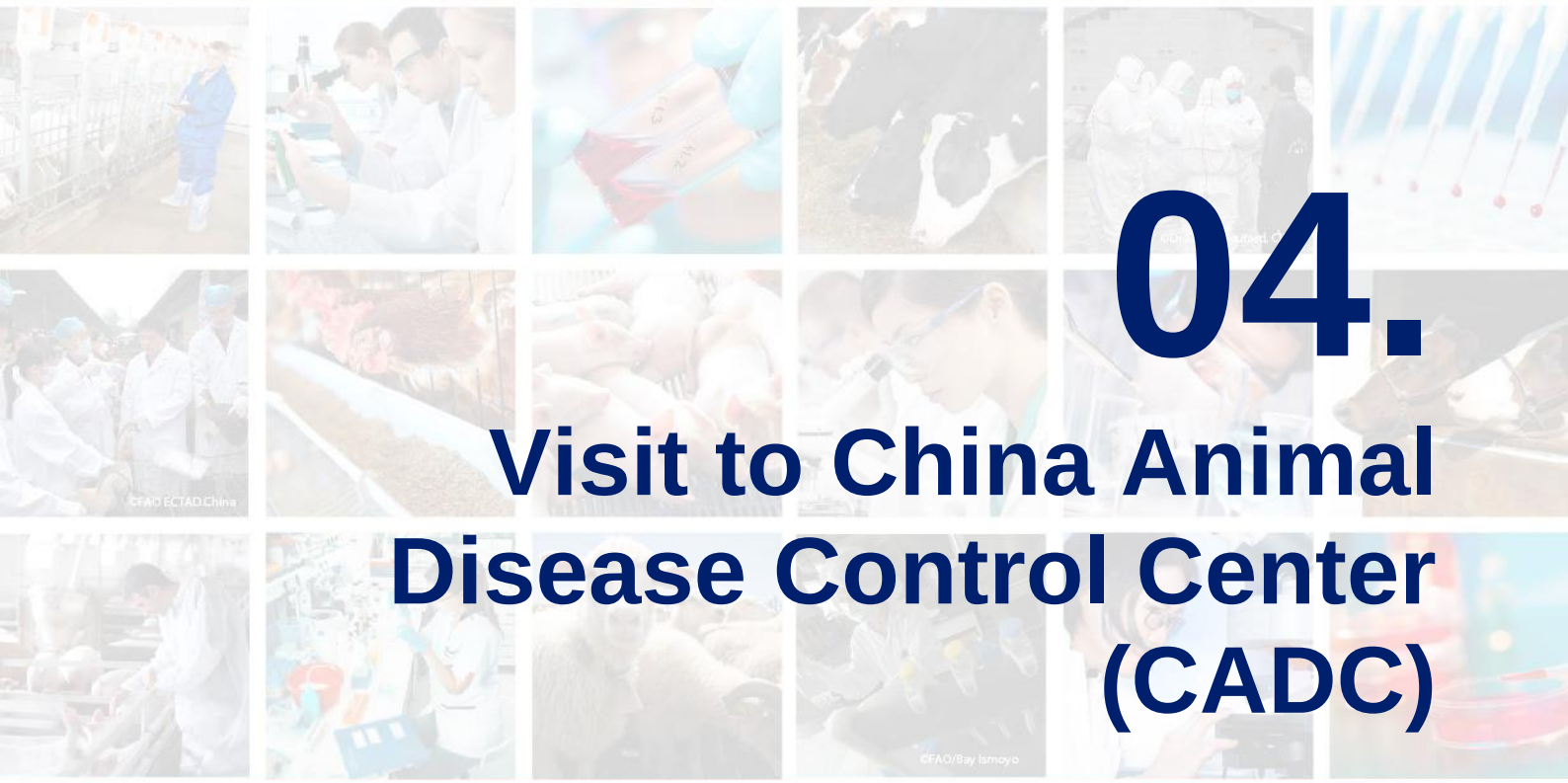

04.

Visit to China Animal Disease Control Center (CADC)

Visit to China Animal Disease Control Center (CADC)

Daniel Beltrán-Alcrudo gave a 2-hour talk at CADC premises in Beijing, covering the current status of ASF, the main risks factors for China and the major international initiatives on ASF (see above for the description of the major initiatives covered). The talk was followed by animated discussions.

In addition, the FAO officers had an opportunity to tour the CADC facilities and laboratory and learn more about CADC activities, role and responsibilities.

The FAO officers held a side meeting with Dr Zhai Xinyan, Director of the swine diseases prevention and control laboratory, who expressed CADC's interest in validating the ASF diagnostics developed in-house by participating in the ring proficiency tests organized by the EU Reference Laboratory for ASF. However, in the past there have been difficulties in getting the reference materials needed for the proficiency tests through customs into China, despite the fact that all materials are inactivated. If it is not possible, CADC would instead like to send their diagnostic tests for validation. In addition, CADC expressed their interest in joining the Global ASF Research Alliance (GARA).

The officers discussed the agenda of the coming LinkTADs workshops in Vienna on 12-16 October 2015 (on laboratory issues and policy). Also within LinkTADs, CADC will be instrumental in the organization of the coming WP8 Dissemination Event in China, which aims to present LinkTADs work to an audience of Chinese researchers. The chosen venue is the Chinese Veterinary Congress, which will take place in November 2015 and will involve around 10,000 people. Since CADC is the organizer of the session on diagnostics, they will save a slot to present LinkTADs (plus three additional presentations by CADC), display a poster and distribute flyers to participants. In addition, CADC will negotiate with organizers the inclusion of additional presentations from LinkTADs partners to present at veterinary laboratory technique session of the congress .

Ever since the visit:

- CADC has received and filled in the necessary documentation to become a GARA member;
- CADC has been put in touch with the Centre for Research on Animal Health (CISA- INIA), which is EU reference Laboratory (EURL) and FAO Reference Centre for ASF, to investigate the processes need for CADC to take part in the ring trials/proficiency tests that CISA-INIA conducts annually
- All the arrangements for the Dissemination Event in China have been finalized.

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Side visits

Side visits

Veterinary Bureau (VB)

In addition, the FAO officers met with Dr. Song Junxia, Director of the Division of Scientific Technologies and International Cooperation, Veterinary Bureau, the Ministry of Agriculture, who is a member of LinkTADs' Advisory Board to discuss major updates on ASF and LinkTADs. The FAO officers briefed her on the major activities to date as well as the coming activities and the possibilities of a follow-up project. Dr Junxia has been invited, as a member of the Advisory Board, to attend the PM meeting in Vienna and present at both the WP4 and the WP5 workshops. She was processing the authorization to attend the events at that moment. In addition, she provided some feedback to the presentations at the workshop, namely to invite representatives of the two Chinese reference laboratories (i.e. Lanzhou and Harbin). Dr Junxia expressed her interest in trying to be more involved in LinkTADs from now on and it was agreed that FAO China would regularly update her on the evolution of the project. Dr Junxia also suggested focusing on one of the up-coming policy webinar on ASF surveillance.

Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação (SPI):

FAO officers met Ms Dong Xin from SPI China office in Beijing. As a LinkTADs partner, SPI is in charge of some aspects of dissemination and organization of events and webinars. The logistics of the following events were discussed and agreed: LinkTADs dissemination event in China, the WP5 webinar on rabies and the WP5 workshop on policy in Vienna.

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06.

Pictures

Pictures

Figure 1 – Presentation at CAHEC, Qingdao

Figure 2 – Discussions at CAHEC

Figure 3 – Presentation at CADC, Beijing

Figure 4 – visit to CADC Laboratory, Beijing

Figure 5 – Meeting with the Veterinary Bureau, Beijing

Figure 6– FAO ECTAD China Office, Beijing

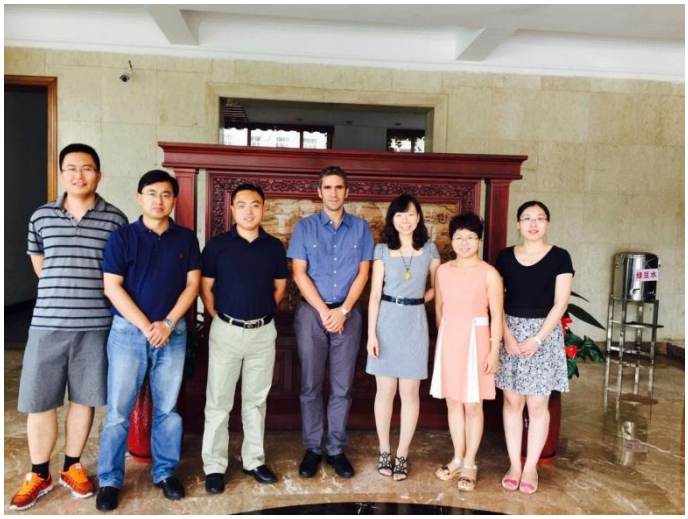

Figure 7 – Meeting with LinkTADs partner representative: Director of the Division of Epidemiology survey, Dr Wang Youming, and staff at CAHEC in Qingdao