EU backs Belgium's pre-emptive swine fever slaughter

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The African strain of the disease was detected in Belgium in dead wild boar ten days ago, near the borders of Germany, France and Luxembourg.

To head-off the spread of the virus, Belgian authorities have set up an exclusion zone and have ordered the preventive slaughter of up to 4,000 beasts.

Farmers will be compensated, partly by Belgium and partly by Europe, but the disease could threaten an industry that supports 15,000 jobs.

"Belgian authorities took the right decision," Anca Paduraru, a spokeswoman for the EU executive, told reporters at a regular briefing.

The European Commission official said the fight against swine fever would be an EU priority because of the threat it poses to the continental economy.

Ten countries outside the union have already banned imports of Belgian pork, but the EU internal market is much more important to the industry.

African swine fever virus (ASFV), which is endemic in parts of Africa, Asia and eastern Europe, is not dangerous to humans but fatal to pigs and wild boar.

Thus far, nine Belgian boar have been found dead from the virus, in the south of the country.

A 630 square kilometre (240 square mile) exclusion zone has been set up, but some farmers are pushing for tougher measures such as a boar cull.

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