

Swine fever in wild boars worries Italy's pork industry

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The discovery of African swine fever in northern Italy has Italian pork producers fearing significant economic damage to a major agricultural export and has forced curtailing of the official seasons to hunt for game and to gather prized truffles.

Earlier this month, a case of the virus, which can be deadly to pigs but doesn't harm humans, was detected in a wild [boar](#) in the Piedmont region in northwest Italy.

Wild boars, whose meat is used in pasta sauces, are a popular prey for hunters in Italy.

The nation's health and agricultural ministers banned hunting and other public access in the woods and parklands of parts of Liguria and Piedmont to try to prevent the spread of the virus in more animals.

To limit the opportunities for contact with possibly other infected wild boars, parts of those two regions have been declared off-limits to bikers and hikers, and for fishing and hunting for game. Also not allowed is gathering truffles. Mushroom gathering is also banned through the next few months.

According to Piedmont's official calendar for [truffle](#) hunting, which uses dogs, the season to gather the highly prized white truffles, including those that come from the Alba area of Piedmont, ends on Jan. 31, so most of that season had already run its course.

Gathering of some black truffles must be completed by November or December, depending on the kind, but other kinds of black truffles would normally still be gathered through the rest of winter.

The Italian farm lobby Confagricoltura says that China, Japan, Taiwan and Kuwait have already suspended imports of Italian pork and that neighboring Switzerland has also imposed some restrictions.

Italy's exports of pork and pork products amount to 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) annually, with about one-third of that coming from sales outside the European Union.

Other regions in Italy's north are pressing for a crackdown on wild boars outside the stricken area in a bid to save their own pork production.

"The African swine fever can hit pigs and boars, it's highly contagious, often lethal," Gianluca Barbacovi, the head of farm lobby Coldiretti in Italy's Trentino Alto Adige region, said Saturday.

The European Food Safety authority says that healthy pigs and boar usually become infected by, among other means, contact with infected animals, including free-ranging pigs and wild boar.

A proliferation of [wild boars](#) has also plagued urban areas, including some neighborhoods in the capital of Rome in recent years. The boars break through fences ringing parks on the outskirts of the city and invade streets to root through uncollected garbage for food.

Lobbyists for Italy's prestigious Prosciutto di Parma (Parma Ham) production have hastened to calm any fears by consumers, saying that the aging process its meat undergoes renders the African swine fever virus harmless.

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