



Public Opinion Research with Canadians to support communications on African Swine Fever (ASF) 2022-23

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Executive Summary

March 2023

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This public opinion research report presents the results of quantitative and qualitative research conducted by Quorus Consulting Group Inc. on behalf of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in February 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Recherche sur l'opinion publique canadienne de 2022-2023 pour appuyer les communications liées à la peste porcine africaine

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Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is written over a light gray, textured rectangular background.

March 17, 2023
Rick Nadeau, President
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Executive Summary

Research purpose and objectives

African swine fever (ASF) is a viral disease that only impacts pigs. It poses a significant risk to the health of the Canadian swine herd, pork industry and the Canadian economy. ASF is highly contagious for pigs and can spread rapidly through both direct and indirect contact with infected pigs or pig products, as well as contaminated farm equipment, feed and clothing.

Since 2018, the disease has been spreading across Asia and Europe, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has placed significant effort in mitigating the risks of introducing ASF into Canada and preparing if a case was found here.

To continue to mitigate the risk of ASF in Canada, the CFIA intends to communicate with Canadians, especially those who may engage in activities that are more likely to spread ASF into Canada, such as international travel, importing food, or living in rural areas where swine is more likely to be present.

The objectives of the research were as follows:

- Gain a better understanding of the level of awareness of African swine fever among the Canadian public;
- Gain a better understanding of the Canadian public's opinions, perception and concern of African swine fever;
- Gain a better understanding of the Canadian public's travel plans to international destinations;
- Determine if family or friends of those in Canada intended to visit from outside Canada;
- Determine if Canadians receive international mail that may contain food products;
- Determine if travellers are aware of the requirements to declare pork products when coming back to Canada.

Methodology

The qualitative portion consisted of eight online focus groups with specific target audiences that Quorus completed between February 7 and February 13, 2023. Two sessions were held with individuals who travel internationally, three with individuals from specific ethnic communities (one with Italians and Germans, one with Chinese, Filipinos and Vietnamese, and one with Haitians), and three sessions with individuals who live in rural areas, including individuals who live close to pig farms or who own pigs themselves. A total of 61 individuals participated in the focus groups.

The quantitative portion of the study consisted of a national online survey of 2,732 households in Canada, with some oversampling of specific target audiences. Survey data were collected from February 1 to February 23, 2023.

Qualitative research results

Overall views on and experiences with traveling or shipping products into Canada

Travelers

Individuals who travel internationally often bring items back to Canada with them, ranging from souvenirs and alcohol to clothing and food items. Travelers shared a range of views when it came to bringing back food into Canada. For the most part, travelers indicated that they do declare food items when traveling home. Most are comfortable bringing back food that they feel will easily clear customs (for example, packaged or processed products such as snacks). Many travelers do not attempt to bring back fresh or unprocessed food items such as raw fruit, vegetables or meat, mostly out of concern for keeping the items fresh during their long trip home, especially raw meat. If they do bring unprocessed food items home, they tend to be seeds, fruit, or herbs.

There is a general awareness of the legislative requirements related to bringing certain food items back into Canada. Some have become aware of these requirements from having travelled in the past, and others have visited websites to research what was allowed into the country. Although they are aware of these requirements, some do view them more as suggestions than hard and fast rules that could lead to heavy fines. Few were also aware of the potential impact on Canada of bringing in food items that are not allowed. For the most part, participants suspected that it might introduce a foreign species, such as a foreign plant or insect. A few also suspected it might introduce a disease. However, participants did not generally believe that one food item could have too detrimental an impact on Canada or the Canadian economy as a whole.

Members of ethnic communities

Members of ethnic communities rarely feel the need to “import” or bring back special or traditional food items that aren’t readily available in their area. For most, they can in fact find all those items, or similar ones, from somewhere in Canada. If they do obtain those kinds of food items, they tend to be when they travel overseas or when family members visit them from international destinations. Similar to general results pertaining to travelers, these participants avoid obtaining raw produce or meats, again mostly out of concerns for encountering problems at customs or out of concern for having the food item spoil by the time they want to consume it. Members of ethnic communities do not generally receive or order food items from international destinations. They avoid ordering these types of products online because it is cost-prohibitive. They avoid receiving it in the mail from family or friends located overseas out of concern for freshness.

Like travelers, these individuals tended to be fairly aware of legislative requirements limiting bringing back food items when traveling home from an international destination. Few however seemed aware that there were requirements in place that prohibited having food items mailed to them. The extent to which this target audience was familiar with the reasons behind such requirements was consistent with what travelers shared – the food item brought into Canada could introduce a foreign species (a plant or insect) or it could introduce a virus or disease (especially spoiled meat).

Rural residents and pig owners

Other than pig owners themselves, few individuals who live in rural regions or in proximity to pigs seemed to take any particular measures beyond what typical travelers do when returning home from an international trip. When specifically prompted for why they should take certain measures, these participants tended to be triggered by the reference to pigs and pig farms more than anything else. They suspect it could be related to spreading diseases although they were far from knowing how serious the impacts could be.

Among pig owners, particularly those with big farms, there was more awareness of requirements when it comes to travelling with or importing food items and thus avoiding doing so. On the other hand, here, too, there were those who admitted to not really considering the requirements when they had travelled in the past.

When travelling back to Canada after international trips, pig owners reported taking safety measures such as washing hands and decontaminating clothes, and using sanitizer and disinfectants to avoid transferring any illnesses to their pigs. Those on big pig farms also spoke of following isolation rules and high decontamination standards. These individuals also avoid visiting pig facilities outside of Canada to avoid bringing illnesses back to their own pigs.

Living with or near pigs

Non-pig owners

Individuals who do not own pigs but live in rural regions, very rarely come into contact with pigs or with individuals who work with pigs. Sporadic contact might involve shopping from a local farmer (although they do not come close to where pigs are kept). Very few interact with pigs from local farmers, mostly because they are not set up as petting zoos – they are commercial pig farmers that are not accessible to the public.

Other than a few individuals who had worked for companies that supplied farms, non-pig owners were not particularly familiar with any safety protocols in place on farms or properties with pigs. Participants did not seem to be too concerned given they do not visit pig farms.

A few participants who had friends or family with pet pigs were somewhat more familiar with protocols, for example indicating that they were always required to wash their hands before and after visiting with the pig.

Pig owners

Pig owners consisted of a range of smaller hobby farmers, commercial farmers, as well as individuals who own pigs as pets. These pig owners were typically confident in their knowledge when it comes to keeping and caring for pigs, considering themselves experts, irrespective of how many pigs they own.

When it comes to tending to their pigs, answers varied based on the number of pigs and the type of pig farm. Commercial pig farmers described large stables that comply with all the requirements and regulations they are subject to. Hobby farmers who also have other animals besides pigs, which was quite common, also tended to keep their pigs in their own barn or pen on their property. Some were free to roam around the property, while others did not allow their pigs around other animals. Among those who had one or two pet pigs, it was more common for the pig(s) to come inside the house as well.

For those with hobby farms or pet pigs, family members, often children, help out with tending to the pigs and follow certain rules and standards. Larger pig producers have staff to assist with caring for their pigs.

Pig farmers do not use table scraps as feed but only use special pig feeds, antibiotics and vitamins. Feeding logs are strictly kept and checklists maintained. On the other hand, those who have pet pigs sometimes feed them food scraps such as leftovers from their own meals in addition to their grains, vegetables, barley or special pig feed.

Awareness and concern about the risk of ASF

Across all groups, there was high familiarity with at least a few animal diseases, with many naming avian flu and “mad cow” disease. To a lesser extent, participants were aware of West Nile virus, rabies, and swine flu. It should be noted that participants used the words “swine flu” but never referred to “African Swine Fever.” Some pig owners spoke of “ASF” but also often thought the “F” stood for “Flu.” Participants realized that these types of diseases could be detrimental to herds with farmers having to destroy most if not all of their livestock if they get infected. There was a perception that humans might get sick if they consumed infected meat.

Although participants were not aware of any foreign animal diseases, this did not lessen how concerned they were that such diseases could negatively impact the Canadian economy. Participants described how quickly COVID-19 spread to all parts of the world and that this could easily happen again.

Awareness of African Swine Fever specifically was quite low and it is highly probable that some participants were conflating this disease with swine flu. Consistent with the very low level of awareness of ASF, nearly none of the participants had seen, read or heard anything related to ASF over the past year or so, and nobody had actively looked for information on the disease.

Only a few large pig farmers had heard of it in the past, but had received this information through formal or informal channels, rather than actively looking for it.

Similarly, awareness of wild pigs in Canada was also quite low. Among the very few aware of them, the biggest challenge they presented was that they do significant damage to farmer fields.

In terms of how animal diseases are “managed” in Canada, participants tended to believe that it is generally well managed. They attribute this to the fact that such diseases are not constantly in the headlines and that they do not tend to see meat recalls all that often. Many associate Health Canada, Agriculture Canada, and their provincial department of health with disease management in Canada. Very few mentioned the CFIA spontaneously although many acknowledged that it would make sense that this agency is one of the organizations responsible.

Review of online resources and advertisements

Participants were presented with online resources from the CFIA website and asked to provide their general feedback:

Pig owners and those living near pigs were shown the following website: [Close your gate on African swine fever - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](https://www.inspection.gc.ca/health-safety/assessing-the-risk-of-african-swine-fever/2019-05-22/eng/15262421-8000-4980-9000-000110000000):

- Participants tended to consider the content informative, not overly dense, and easy to understand.

- Some would click on the link to the biosecurity checklist.
- It was generally seen as targeting (smaller) pig owners, and the main message was clear.
- Some of the suggestions in terms of improvement included:
 - To make the mention of “there is no treatment for ASF” bold or a headline
 - To add information about the spread of the disease around the globe

All other groups were shown the following website: [Protect Canada's pigs from African swine fever - Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#):

- Participants tended to consider the content informative, easy to understand and laid out in a user-friendly fashion. The capsule approach with an image for each theme was appreciated.
- The maximum penalty of \$1,300 got the attention of many participants.
- Participants would like a direct link to ASF-infected countries.
- While most appreciated the range of languages in which material was available, many also questioned why certain languages had been selected and why more are not available.
 - Some assumed that these were the languages of the countries where ASF was prevalent, but they would like to see that made clear.

Participants were also shown online advertising concepts with the slogan “Don’t pack pork”. These concepts can be found in the detailed results section as well as in the moderation guide in Appendix B. The main reactions to the concepts included the following:

- They would be noticeable if they saw them online or in social media.
- The information was deemed easy to understand for the most part.
- The concept stating to not pack pork was seen as far more relevant than the one stating to not mail pork, which for many was fairly inconceivable.
- Many felt that the design of the “package” in the “Don’t mail pork” concept was weak mostly because it did not look like a package.
- Any concept that gave the “why” behind the recommendation to not pack of mail pork was preferred. Participants felt it was more impactful and more meaningful.
- The concept with the open suitcase received mixed reviews – some liked that it showed meat in the suitcase which made it intuitive while others felt it was less credible and hard to decipher.

Individuals who own pigs were also shown another set of concepts. Each of the concepts featured a young girl and an adult in a field next to a pig. The first including the text “Protect your pigs from African Swine Fever” with a transition to text saying, “Learn more”. The second concept included the text “Close the gate on African Swine Fever” with a transition to text saying, “Get

the checklist”. These concepts can be found in the detailed results section as well as in the moderation guide in Appendix B.

The main reactions to these concepts included the following:

- Participants felt it mostly targeted hobby farm owners rather than commercial pig farmers given the picture of a small girl in a field with small pigs.
- While the message is clear, the concepts got mixed feedback. There was some sense that it was not serious or alarming enough given the seriousness of the threat of ASF. The idea that ASF was deadly and has no cure does not come across.
 - More direct messaging (“your pig may die”) was said to be more attention-grabbing and direct
- “Protect your pig” resonated more with pet pig owners while farmers were more likely to relate to the idea of gates.
- Some preferred the direct call to action to “get the checklist” while others, mostly those less familiar, preferred the more general “learn more.”

Finally, participants were asked if they preferred a slogan that said, “Don’t pack pork” or one that said “Pigs don’t fly.” While many chuckled at the second option, most tended to prefer the current slogan of “Don’t pack pork.” There was a sense that a serious issue deserves a serious slogan. As well, given how little they know about ASF, the more direct the message or instructions (in this case to not pack pork), the better.

Qualitative research disclaimer

Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively projectable measures. The purpose is not to generate “statistics” but to hear the full range of opinions on a topic, understand the language participants use, gauge degrees of passion and engagement and to leverage the power of the group to inspire ideas. Participants are encouraged to voice their opinions, irrespective of whether or not that view is shared by others.

Due to the sample size, the special recruitment methods used, and the study objectives themselves, it is clearly understood that the work under discussion is exploratory in nature. The findings are not, nor were they intended to be, projectable to a larger population.

Specifically, it is inappropriate to suggest or to infer that few (or many) real world users would behave in one way simply because few (or many) participants behaved in this way during the sessions. This kind of projection is strictly the prerogative of quantitative research.

Quantitative research results

Respondents were asked their aided awareness of five animal diseases. Awareness was highest for swine flu (H1N1) at 85%, followed closely by avian influenza (bird flu) at 82% and mad cow disease at 81%. Awareness drops to 22% for Chronic wasting disease (CWD) and to 17% for African Swine Fever (ASF). Overall, nine in ten respondents were aware of at least one of these diseases.

Among those aware of at least one disease, 43% felt they were not concerned with any of the ones with which they were aware. Overall, avian influenza garnered the most attention, with 26% of respondents aware of at least one disease selecting this one as the disease with which they are the most concerned. Swine flu and mad cow disease were equally worrisome at 13% and 14% respectively. Very few considered CWD (3%) or ASF (1%) the “most concerning.”

Focusing specifically on those who indicated being aware of ASF, just over one in four believe they are either very familiar (4%) or somewhat familiar (22%) with this disease. A plurality, at 49%, say they are not very familiar and the remaining 24% are not at all familiar. Those not very, those somewhat and those very familiar with ASF were asked where they had seen, read or heard anything about the disease. The most common sources were in the news or in the media (57%), followed by social media (21%) and through family or friends (14%). A small group had seen something while traveling or at airports (6%).

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) did not know how to answer when asked whether or not ASF had been found in Canada and whether precautions needed to be taken one way or the other. Among those with an opinion, most (17%) believed that ASF had not been found in Canada but that we should still take as many precautions as possible. Ten percent believe ASF has been found in Canada, with roughly half believing there is nothing to worry about and the other half believing we should take as many precautions as possible.

Various behaviours can introduce African swine fever (ASF) into Canada and then spread it. When presented with four of the more commonly known behaviours, nearly half of respondents (49%) were not aware of any. Similar proportions were aware of the following behaviours:

- 37% - Bringing back pork products from a trip outside Canada
- 36% - Visiting a pig farm or a property where pigs are found in Canada soon after having visited a pig farm or a property where pigs are found while traveling outside Canada (including, zoos, animal sanctuaries, and hunting where wild pigs are found)
- 31% - Receiving pork products in the mail from friends or family members located outside Canada

Among the behaviours listed, the one garnering the lowest level of awareness was feeding food scraps and waste to pigs (13%).

These four behaviours were revisited in the survey to explore the extent to which each one posed a risk in terms of introducing or spreading ASF in Canada. The behaviour considered a high risk by the greatest proportion of respondents was bringing back pork products from a trip outside Canada and not declaring them at customs (53%). This was followed by receiving pork products in the mail from friends or family members located outside Canada (43%) and by visiting a pig farm or a property where pigs are found in Canada (39%). The behaviour deemed the least risky was feeding food scraps and waste to pigs (17%). For each behaviours, it should be noted that an important proportion of respondents “did not know”.

In terms of the perceived impact ASF could have on them personally, on the Canadian pork industry and on the Canadian economy, the study revealed the following:

- 27% of respondents would be very concerned that ASF **could affect them** if ASF were to appear in Canada.
- 50% of respondents would be very concerned that ASF **could affect the Canadian pork industry** if ASF were to appear in Canada. A greater proportion (57%) believe the impact on the Canadian pork industry would be fairly significant.
- 36% of respondents would be very concerned that ASF **could affect the Canadian economy** if ASF were to appear in Canada. A similar proportion (35%) believe the impact on the Canadian economy would be fairly significant.
- Finally, 42% would be fairly concerned about the danger ASF could pose to food safety if ASF were to appear in Canada.

A minority of respondents (28% gave a rating of 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale) expressed a strong level of interest in finding out more about ASF and how it affects Canadians. Another 34% expressed a moderate level of interest (gave a rating of 4 or 5). Respondents would be most likely to search for information via a general online search (53%), followed by the Government of Canada (50%), their provincial/territorial governments (31%), news outlets (25%) and the Pork Industry Association (24%).

If they were to obtain information on ASF from the Government of Canada, the greatest proportion would like to receive that information through the Government of Canada website (60%), followed by television (37%). Similar proportions would get it through social media (22%) and email (20%).

When asked who they believe has the most responsibility for ensuring that ASF is properly monitored and controlled in Canada, the Government of Canada was voted most responsible by

46% of respondents. Top responsibility was assigned to large commercial pig producers and to businesses that import foods into Canada by 13% respectively. When considering “top-2” votes, provincial/territorial governments rise in terms of importance, with 35% of respondents selecting them as most or 2nd most responsible.

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