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Food safety a major factor

A maximum level of food safety is crucial for many buyers of pork products. The Danish pork sector offers customers a great deal in this area. Thanks to its high standards, the industry recently sealed a promising agreement with China.

Danish pork marketers are also very successful in Southeast Asian markets. Last year, the industry exported 225,000 t of goods to China alone. This corresponds to an export share of almost 13 percent. China is thus at the top of exports to third countries. In demand are especially such by-products as pork ears and pork feet. In 2017, Denmark delivered over 150,000 t of these parts in addition to nearly 74,000 t of pork pieces.

Because Danish marketers score with their Chinese trade partners primarily due to high food safety standards, consumers in the “Middle Kingdom” are now enjoying other pork

products from Denmark as well. Chinese authorities recently approved imports of heat-treated meat from several Danish companies. The Danish Agriculture & Food Council had long awaited this day for the country’s pork producers. “Together with our authorities, we have fought for over ten years. Now, the first companies can sell sausages, cold cuts and preserved meats to the Chinese,” says Karen Hækkerup, CEO of the Council. The result of the Danish-Chinese agreement will probably be additional exports of almost 34 mill. euros per year. “In view of the current Chinese interest for Danish foods, more earnings are likely in the long run,” says Karen Hækkerup.



Continuous inspections in all stages of the value chain guarantee a maximum level of food safety. Danish Agriculture & Food Council - Bild: Danish Agriculture & Food Council

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Food safety has top priority

The Chinese trade partners – like other customers around the globe – know what Danish suppliers have to offer in terms of product quality and safety. The country’s pork sector has established several wide-ranging food safety standards, including the Global Red Meat Standard (GRMS). This transparently and thoroughly documents how company quality assurance and control systems are guaranteeing flawless quality, hygiene and food safety.

Another supporting pillar is the Salmonella prevention program established in the industry over 20 years ago. This monitoring system is effective and fully integrated. All Danish pork herds are continuously inspected for Salmonella in order to ultimately reduce its occurrence in herds and fresh meat to a minimum. Ten blood samples from breeding and rearing establishments are drawn and

analyzed per month. If the index calculated from the results exceeds the value 5, the inspectors take additional samples from the stalls to determine the Salmonella type. Based on the results, the establishments are classified into the groups A, B and C. Category A establishments show no signs of Salmonella. Operations in category B are those in which Salmonella was found. The types of these, however, are unproblematic for the herds; human infections are all but excluded. Operations that show the Salmonella types Typhimurium, Infantis or Derby are classified as group C. Pig farms are also under continual professional supervision. In this case, animals are inspected using meat juice samples taken in slaughterhouses, which are then analyzed for Salmonella antibodies. Based on the results, an index is subsequently calculated. If it exceeds 65, the pig farm is graded as level 3. Pigs from such holdings are slaughtered separately under special hygiene precautions. Index values between 40 and 65 are graded at level 2. Agricultural operations classified as levels 2 and 3 receive only reduced prices for their porkers. Danish sows are also regularly inspected. The procedure for this is equivalent to that in the breeding and rearing stage. Sow herds are monitored based on risks. If a sow-herding operation of group A supplies a feedlot that is subsequently classified as a level 2 or 3, stall samples are taken in order to clarify whether the cause of Salmonella contamination is due to the sow herds.

Lowest Salmonella levels

The decades-long consistent control of Salmonella in the production of poultry, eggs, pork and beef has borne fruit in Denmark. Broiler flocks in Germany's northern neighbor, for example, are long Salmonella-free. Denmark's request for approval of a special "Salmonella-free" status for its poultry was approved this past February EU-wide. This also means that the Danish authorities can demand from now on that imported broilers must also be Salmonella-free.

According to the most recent Annual Report on Zoonoses in Denmark 2016, cases of human Salmonella poisoning are currently at their lowest levels since 1988. Thanks to the Danish Salmonella Control Program, the number of human Salmonella infections was reduced by over 95 percent in the past years. At the same time, the restrictive application of the most important reserve antibiotics in Danish agriculture, including fluorinones, third- and fourth-generation cephalosporins as well as colistin, has led to the fact that no multi-resistant germs in pigs or pork samples were detected. The number of human salmonellosis cases caused by consumption of meat produced in Denmark has remained at a stable low level for many years. Over 60 percent of the instances of Salmonella found in the country were in imported meat. Particularly problematic is that the germs brought in from third countries are often more frequently resistant to antibiotics.

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