



**Love
for the
profession**

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THE EXPORT OF PORK
ROSE BY

5.2%

IN THE FIRST HALF
OF 2018

What is happening with meat consumption?

In the past few decades, an entirely new social discussion on the consumption of meat has developed via modern media. To the extent that radical activists in the most extreme case even want to ban the consumption of meat completely in time.

This social discussion revolves around different themes: human food and health, animal welfare, environmental protection and animal health. In the long term, a number of positions undermine meat as a product.

Human food and health: on the basis of questionable proof, meat is linked to a number of chronic diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, etc.) with the result that a lot of dietary advice targets meat. This advice is generally disseminated by many opinion makers, whilst they ignore the essential nutrients of meat. Many dietary guidelines aim to limit the consumption of meat.

Animal welfare: a growing part of our West European population is rewriting "On the origin of species" by Darwin. An increasing number of people are placing animals on the same level as man. Not only dogs and cats have been given a human dimension, but also more and more productive livestock such as cows and pigs. This concern for the treatment of the animals seems to us to be the main reason for limiting or ending the consumption of meat for a number of segments of the population.

Animal production has also come under fire for environmental reasons. As a result, the protection of the environment is being integrated into the perception of meat quality.

In the past 10 to 20 years, this perception has drastically changed. This evolution of the social perception can be summarised in 4 steps: (1) from the visual quality and flavour of the product, to (2) food safety, which for a long time was part of quality, which spills over to (3) the nutritional qualities to finally become (4) the ethics of production. To varying degrees, a growing share of our European population wants a response to this and as a result is reducing its meat consumption.

This was debated at length together with Prof. Leroy at our 13th Round Table in Brussels, of which you will find a report in this Meat News.

The importance of transparent communication in times of crisis was also on the agenda of this Round Table, with testimony by Dr. Houdart of the Belgian Food Agency. Arely two weeks after his discourse, a few cases of African swine fever were detected in boars in the southernmost part of Belgium. That's actually a jump of 1000 km in Europe. No danger at all to man. But it is for porcine animals. And with all the economic consequences that entails.

During the redaction of this newsletter the diagnosis of African Swine Fever was confirmed in two wild boars in the south of Belgium. More info on page 8.



René Maillard



Meat in the post-truth era



Prof. dr. ir. Frédéric Leroy, Research Group Industrial Microbiology and Food Biotechnology – Department of Sciences and Bio-Engineering Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Public opinion is increasingly influenced by emotions and opinions rather than by objective facts, this is also called post-truth. This leads to a trend towards sensation. Prof. Leroy researched the impact of this evolution on the image of meat, that became a pawn in the war between meat-lovers and the anti-meat lobby in the mass media.

1310 news items

Prof. Leroy's research group recently published a new document about meat's place in the post-truth era. Debates in mass media about sickness and health formed the point of departure. 'We based our research on items on MailOnline, internationally speaking one of the most-visited online news platforms. We chose the period from 2001 to 2015, so that the items were all from after the BSE crisis, Prof. Leroy explains. 'We studied every item with the search term 'meat' in the category 'health', which meant a total of 1310 news items, that we categorised as positive, negative or neutral.'

Globally speaking, 52% of the items were assessed as being negative, 35% as positive and 13% as neutral. 'What was noticeable was the scientification of the articles', testifies Prof. Leroy. 'Thus half the articles referred to a scientific source, such as an official health institute, a research institute or a specific scientific study. 18% of the articles referred to for example food editors, natural health practitioners or midwives. 14% of the articles remained vague about their source and in 18% of the articles, no source at all was named.'

Between 2001 and 2015, 1310 news reports on meat were examined: 52% were rated as negative, 35% as positive and 13% as neutral.



Meat stimulates strength, vitality and fertility

'The articles assessed as being positive could be divided into two large groups. There were the items that reassured users after a crisis. For example BSE, avian flu or the association of red meat with cancer. In addition, the revival of the Atkins diet, in which meat plays an important role, also yielded positive news for meat. Our research then distilled the main topics highlighted in these pro-meat articles, namely strength, vitality and fertility', Prof. Leroy summarises. 'In the category strength, the articles often referred to general health and growth, above all focussing on children. In addition, meat also appeared frequently as the basis for good mental health, fitness and vitality. Meat is also often linked to good fertility in both men and women. Finally, the articles also considered eating meat natural and normal.'

Negative items play on fear

'The interaction of negative news with positive items is remarkable', Leroy continues. 'Thus disbelievers seized the Atkins diet to cast meat in a bad light. In addition, a number of food incidents or studies about meat and health gave rise to negative reporting about meat. Above all chronic diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular disorder were associated with eating meat, that was even put on the same level as smoking and asbestos. And pro-meat arguments were refuted. Thus, meat is alleged to have a negative impact on the state of mind and fertility. Such articles played to consumers' fear and were written amongst other things at the request of an animal rights organisation that wanted to sow confusion via the mass media', Leroy testifies.



Iwona Dyba, Thomas Parzybut, Jörg Schiffler, Barbara Libera, Ennio Bonilauri, Martina Nober, Lieselotte Desimpelaere, Dorinel Niculae, Thierry Becqueriaux, Rainer Heck, Paula Calistru, Frédéric Leroy, Dirk Lenders, Martijn Schwillens, Marco Theimer, Philippe Houdart, Koen Vanswijgenhoven, René Maillard, Vanessa Ringler, Renate Kühlcke, Michael Jakobi, Pino Righi, Suzanne Fischer, Joris Coenen, Michele Stynen, Velo Mitrovich, Lara Naldini

‘Open the debate!’

The participants of the Round Table remark that the meat sector did not react much to fake news. ‘This is partly due to the fact that in Europe the meat sector is very fragmented. Furthermore, it is easier to tell something wrong than to prove it is wrong’, Leroy reacts. ‘But you cannot cut science off from society. Make sure that you integrate the public’s voice into the discussion or you will lose them. Open the debate!’, Leroy concludes.

‘THE LACK OF UNAMBIGUOUS SCIENTIFIC STUDIES MEANS THAT THE READERS ARE CONFUSED BY TWO TOTALLY OPPOSING MESSAGES.’



Meat sector versus veggie lobby: rebuilding confidence versus sowing confusion

‘Each time meat was shown in a bad light, experts appeared to reassure consumers. Dieticians, nutritionists and other experts were quoted to add force to the message. At the same time, the anti-meat lobby continued to communicate intensively. The lack of unambiguous scientific studies means that the readers are confused by two totally opposing messages. In addition, over the years we saw a strong evolution to longer headings with ever more sensationalism’, emphasises Leroy.

What does science say?

‘Many scientific are sloppy in their use of association and risk. After all, an association does not mean that a causal link exists. However, all too often weak associations are abused to cast meat in a bad light. What’s more, not every risk entails a danger’, Leroy continues. ‘That’s why we would do better to speak in terms of absolute danger, instead of relative risks. That would provide a far clearer image of the effective danger of a certain product. For example: IF a causal link did exist between colorectal cancer and meat products, then this means that a relative risk of 18% translates into an increase of the absolute risk that someone will develop colorectal cancer from 5.5% to 6.6%. So, an increase of the absolute risk by 1% no less.

This is far less sensational and gives the consumer a clearer picture’, illustrates Leroy. ‘Other studies look only at studies in animals and all too easily make the connection to the effects on human health.’

The danger of cherry picking

‘There are sufficient studies that meat fits perfectly in a healthy diet and there are no significant differences between meat eaters and vegetarians with regard to cancer or cardiovascular disease. The problem is that the mass media, under the influence of the anti-meat lobby, is tempted to cherry pick. After all, they choose only the items and studies that fit their argument and ignore other studies’, observes Leroy. ‘It’s clear that this gives a distorted view. There are a lot of studies that show that meat does not represent an increased risk or even has a positive effect or plays a protective role. Unfortunately, such studies barely get any attention. After all, it is human to aim for a good story, belief or personal interest rather than the truth’, Leroy concludes.

Crisis communication or communication crisis?

In times of fake news and mass media, the FASFC must communicate about food incidents. Which is no easy task. Philip Houdart sketches the pitfalls and how the FASFC avoids them.



Philip Houdart, Director Crisis Prevention and Management, FASFC (Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain).

‘The FASFC’s task is to guarantee the safety of the food chain and the quality of food, to protect the health of humans, animals and plants.’ says Philip Houdart. ‘We pay a great deal of attention to communication and ensure that it is transparent, professional and credible.

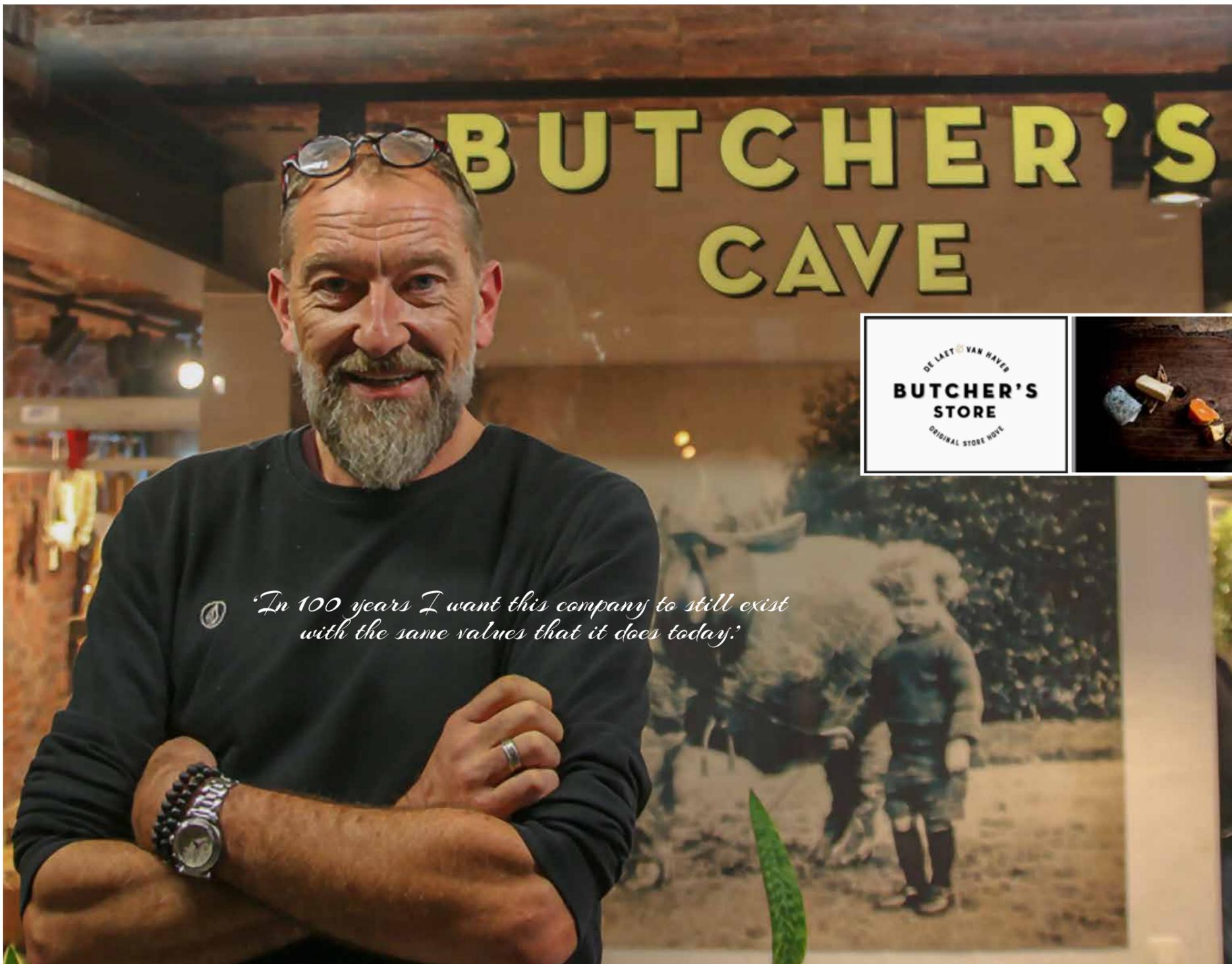
“We always communicate without delay if there is a risk to the public health.”

The latter is not always easy.’ Philip Houdart explains. ‘In the case of a crisis where there is a judicial investigation running that requires investigation secrecy, we at the FASFC cannot communicate about the investigation whilst that is what public opinion and the media demand. The Fipronil crisis last summer is a good example of this. That is why communication remains important but our task is above all to control the crisis and not harm the investigation.’

Primary task

Philip Houdart clarifies that the FASFC’s primary task continues to be to protect the food chain. He does conclude that instead of not communicating during the crisis because there was no danger to the public health, it would have been better to communicate even if there was nothing to say. ‘After all, the press always blows up food-related issues out of proportion, and as a result of our not communicating, the general public lost faith in the FASFC’ says Houdart. ‘The same happened during the incident with VEVIBA. In that case, too, the FASFC was obliged to respect the secrecy of the judicial investigation and communication was difficult with all that that entailed.’

‘Food incidents are easy prey for the media and as the FASFC we have to adapt our communication to the new reality’ Philip Houdart summarises. ‘There is zero tolerance from the general public or politicians with regard to food and it is difficult to keep a rational view of the real risk.’



'In 100 years I want this company to still exist with the same values that it does today.'

Love for the profession and for meat at De Laet & Van Haver

The story of De Laet & Van Haver is a story of hard work, passion for the profession and healthy dose of ambition. What started as a local village butcher's shop in Hove in 1992 has in the meantime developed into a company employing 65 people that is a major supplier for internationally renowned restaurants.

Passion, dedication and ambition are the driving force of their success

The faces behind De Laet & Van Haver are Luc De Laet and his wife Peggy Van Haver. Luc learned the craft of butchery during his butcher training and the many hours of work during weekends and holidays. In 1992 he was given the opportunity to start his own butcher's shop when he took over butcher Hendrickx in Hove. He met his future wife there and thus De Laet & Van Haver was created. Seventeen years later, the butcher's shop moved to its current location in Hove. Thanks to the additional space of the premises, Luc and Peggy could make their second dream come true: opening their own restaurant. The Original Butcher's Store Hove and Butcher's Dining were born. The couple's ambition and the many hours worked led to the business experiencing sharp growth in the following years. In 2014 the butcher's shop was given permission to deliver to the wholesale sector. Two years later they opened a second butcher's shop in Antwerp: Butcher's Store Antwerpen. Yet another year later they started a food truck: Butcher's Beast and finally they opened the Butcher's Cave: a bar with an adjoining shop where you can enjoy their meat preparations in combination with their own distilled Butcher's gin.

Constant search for quality

As a result of their passion for their business, Luc and Peggy are constantly looking for the best quality. 'The origin of the meat is what makes the difference', says Luc. The meat in the butcher's shops and the restaurant comes exclusively from farms that they have selected themselves

and visited, about 25 in total. For the beef it can furthermore be said that all the cattle breeds are linked to a terroir. The counter contains not only Belgian White Blue or West-Flemish Red, but also Scottish Black Aberdeen, Irish Angus and exclusive Japanese Wagyu. For the pork they resolutely also choose better quality such as Duke of Berkshire, Duroc d'Olive and Spanish Iberico.

Craft and innovation hand in hand

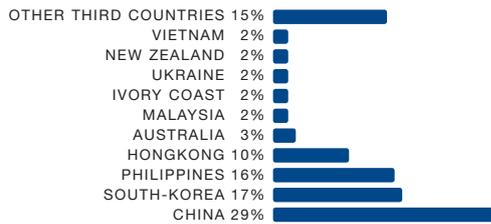
Love of the craft can also be found in the way the meat is processed. "We turn back the clock 70 years whilst working with today's technology and looking toward the future", says Luc De Laet. New technologies are not shunned at all. The extensive range of dry-aged beef is proof of this. The meat ripens in a cold store at 2° Celsius with a precisely modulated relative humidity. This results in a tender piece of meat with an intense flavour. The peak of this is the Secreto 07: wafer-thin sliced Spanish rib-eye that is ripened for 7 weeks in a marinade of 7 different herbs and spices. Luc De Laet has major ambitions for his company: 'In 100 years I want this company to still exist with the same values that it does today.' The opening of Butcher's Craft, a brand-new factory for processing and cutting meat, is already the next step in that direction.

Export figures for 2018

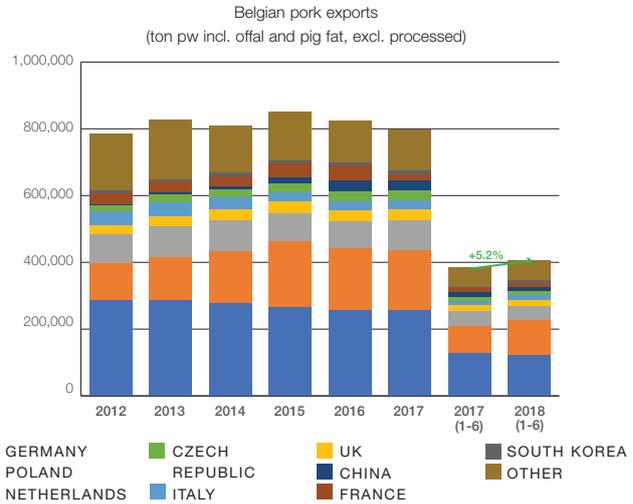


PORK: +5.2%

The export of pork rose by 5.2% in the first half of 2018 compared to the same period last year. Above all Poland, the UK, Czech Republic and South Korea were surprising climbers. Exports to Germany, the Netherlands and China fell.



Belgian pork exports to 3rd countries (volume, 1st semester 2018)

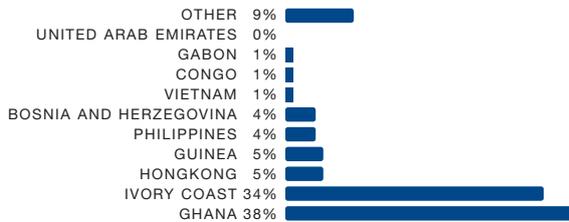


Source: Belgian Meat Office based on Eurostat

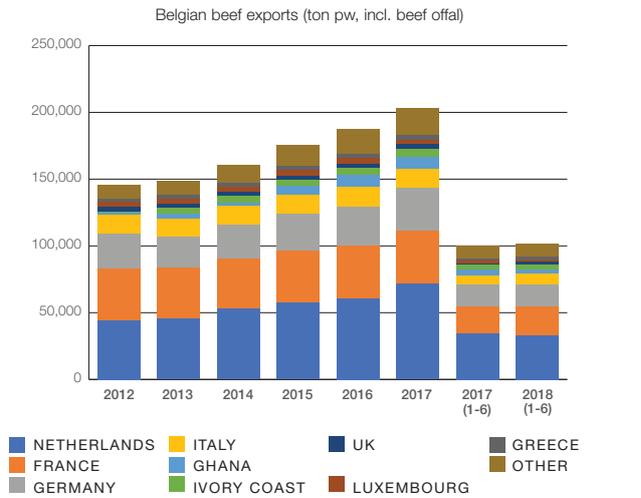


BEEF: +1.1%

The export of beef rose by 1.1% in the first half of 2018 compared to the same period last year. Above all France, Germany, Italy and the Ivory Coast were surprising climbers. Export to third countries fell by 19%.



Belgian beef exports to 3rd countries (2018 1st half year, volume, incl. beef offal)



Source: Belgian Meat Office based on Eurostat

DETECTION OF AFRICAN SWINE FEVER IN BELGIUM

On 14 September 2018, the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) communicated the diagnosis of Africa Swine Fever (ASF virus) in two boars in the south of the Belgian province of Luxembourg. The region has very few domesticated pigs (the majority of the domesticated pigs are in the northern part of Belgium). It is a very contagious viral disease that affects only pigs and boars.



Follow the latest developments of the ASF via our new site www.belgianmeat.com where you can access the official reports by the Belgian Food Agency directly.