

Pig MRSA food scare: Is your business safe?

Fears that the food industry could be on the verge of another scandal to rival that of the foot and mouth outbreak and 'horsegate' are growing as the pig MRSA food scare gathers pace.

Earlier this week, the Guardian revealed that pork products sold in some of the UK's leading supermarkets had been found to be infected with livestock-associated MRSA.

The superbug, known as MRSA CC398, is linked to misuse of antibiotics by factory farms in order to keep livestock healthy in dirty conditions. As a result, the bug now has a high antibiotic resistance. Though MRSA CC398 can be killed by thorough cooking of the meat and is reportedly less harmful to people than the human strains of MRSA, there is still a risk that the superbug could cause recurring infections and illness in those with a vulnerable immune system.

MRSA CC398 primarily affects pigs, however it has been known to infect other farm animals such as poultry, cattle and horses. Since it was first discovered in 2004, MRSA CC398 has become a major health concern in Denmark – at least six people have died from the strain which affects two thirds of pig farms in the country.

The Guardian worked alongside the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) to expose the scandal and said the scientists could not determine whether the pork contaminated with the superbug had originated from UK pigs or from pigs coming from outside the UK, except that it was sold as 'British produced'.

According to the article, British farms currently have no screening programme, although the NPA recommend screening for this disease. Whilst current regulations state that imported pigs should be free of a number of diseases, MRSA CC398 is not one of them due to its perceived minimal threat to humans.

There is demand for more globalised and cost efficient protein sources, so tighter controls to make sure responsible farming are key.

Using an online supply chain mapping software such as Authenticate IS will help you and your customers track, analyse and understand your entire food supply network, giving you transparency "*from farm to fork*". It's a smart and efficient way to help keep your business safe when a food industry scandal hits.