

Genetic engineering to create healthier pigs

By ACSH Staff — June 25, 2015



No, pigs aren't flying yet, but according to an [account](#) ^[1] in the

British paper *The Guardian*, scientists are working on a way to make domestic pigs resistant to African swine fever, a highly contagious ailment that requires slaughtering of infected animals. In Poland this summer, there have been outbreaks of this disease, and at least 6,000 animals are scheduled to be killed. Obviously, this is a big problem for pig farmers especially poor ones (and of course for all consumers, as the costs will be passed on to shoppers).

The technique to make the pigs resistant involves a gene from African warthogs, close relatives of the domestic varieties. Warthogs are naturally resistant to African swine fever. By flipping a gene in fertilized eggs from domestic pigs, the experimental animals will have a gene more like that of the wild pigs. Then the altered eggs are transferred back to the mother pig and are gestated and born normally.

Genetically altered piglets have been born, and are ready to be tested for swine fever resistance. If the technique is successful, it will be applied more widely and should be instrumental in wiping out the disease.

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava commented This would be a real bonanza for both farmers and consumers, as one might imagine that less economic burden to farmers should result in lower food prices to consumers. And since there are no viruses used to carry genes and no transfers from unrelated species, there is virtually nothing for anti-GMOers to complain about. We hope the testing phase is successful and the technique can be widely applied soon.

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[1] <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jun/23/could-these-piglets-become-britains-first-commercially-viable-gm-animals>