

## Egypt presses ahead with pig cull

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Is it Cull or targeting Christians for poverty?

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Egyptian authorities have begun in earnest the slaughter of 300,000 pigs, in what was originally described as a precaution against swine flu.

Officials now say the move is a general health measure aimed at restoring order to Egypt's pig-rearing industry.

The move has been widely criticised and the World Health Organisation says there is no evidence that pigs are transmitting the virus to humans.

Experts also point out that the flu cannot be caught from eating pig meat.

Pig-farming and consumption is limited to Egypt's Christian minority, estimated at 10% of the population.

Farmers clashed with health officials in at least one incident north of Cairo, and the BBC's Christian Fraser in Cairo says there have been noisy church meetings across the country.

Compensation pledge

Cairo governor Abdel Halim Wazir told Egyptian news agency Mena that the government would start slaughtering some 60,000 pigs raised by rubbish collectors in a city slum.

The pigs are generally fed in back yards on what their owners cannot recycle.

Pig farmers have reacted angrily to the slaughter

They will now be moved to specially prepared slaughterhouses, and armed police are on standby to prevent farmers from hiding or smuggling livestock.

The Health Ministry says the government will take advantage of the swine flu outbreak, despite the absence so far of cases in Egypt.

It intends to restructure pig farming so that in future animals are not reared on rubbish tips but on proper farms.

It has said the cull will take around a month to complete.

"The authorities took advantage of the situation to resolve the question of disorderly pig rearing in Egypt," spokesman Abdelrahman Shahine told AFP.

The government has promised pig-owners compensation for their loss.

Our correspondent says the government has been criticised for overreacting to the threat, but it was also criticised for responding too slowly to the bird flu crisis two years ago.

When bird flu appeared in the country in 2006 mass culls were carried out but at least 22 humans died from the disease.