

Hog trade in Vietnam profits from bird flu

SINGAPORE: Poultry producers may be struggling to stay afloat after the deadly bird flu outbreak in Vietnam, but the crisis is a boon for the country's hog industry,

Hog prices in Vietnam were up about 15% from last year, prompting swine farmers and feed makers to look at ways to boost capacities, said Tran Trong Chien, chief representative for Vietnam of the US Grains Council.

“Nobody is eating chicken and the hog industry is reaping the benefits,” Chien, who is also the country director for the American Soybean Association, said from Hanoi.

Medical officials in Vietnam said yesterday that the South-East Asian nation had four more suspected human cases of the bird flu, which has so far killed 49 people in Asia since the end of 2003. The highest number of deaths have occurred in Vietnam.

“It may be difficult to bring the bird flu situation in Vietnam under control soon. The problem could linger for one more year, maybe more,” Chien said.

He added that the problem in Vietnam was acute as there were many small backyard farms spread over the entire country, making it difficult to monitor each and every farm.

Chien said Vietnam's commercial feed production could rise about 10% to about 4.5 million tonnes this year from last year, thanks to buoyant demand from the hog industry, which accounts for about 60% of the total feed demand.

“Last year, hog production rose by one million heads. This year, we are also expecting similar kind of growth,” Chien said, adding that total pig production last year was about 26 million.

He said hog prices were quoted at about US\$1.20 (RM4.56) a kilo in domestic markets. But poultry prices have fallen sharply.

“I know feed plants which are expanding production. They are expecting pork prices to remain firm at least for the next one year,” he added. – Reuters