

Pork is Safe

Minister of Agriculture Christopher Tufton says it is safe to eat local pork and handle local pigs...

saying that the swine flu virus sweeping North America and other parts of the world has only been found in humans and not in pigs or any other animal. Tufton, who was speaking yesterday after a meeting of the National Emergency Animal Disease Committee at the agriculture ministry's Veterinary Services Division in St Andrew, declined to commit himself regarding imported pork products. "I am not willing to venture on a limb as it relates to other producers around the world until I am fully satisfied. That's just being super-cautious," he said. The agriculture minister, however, indicated that the ministry would be careful about issuing import licences in light of the swine flu scare. "I would prefer to err on the side of caution in terms of imports, particularly from countries that are affected, until we are fully clear. It doesn't mean that we are going to ban anything, but we have to be very, very cautious in terms of our approach," Tufton said, in response to queries about the possible banning of pork imports. Dr Osbil Watson, director of the Veterinary Services Division, said the granting of import permits involved a detailed review with a number of considerations. The minister, meanwhile, said the flu outbreak in the countries most affected was being closely monitored.

Tufton, who chairs the committee, said the body would be meeting regularly because of the swine flu outbreak. Winston Williams, managing director of Pioneer Meat Products - producer and distributor of local pork products - said he was happy with the approach being taken because consumers need to be reassured that it is safe to buy pork products. President of the Pig Farmers Association, Angella Bardowell said it was too early to tell whether there had been a downturn in pork product sales because of the swine flu outbreak. Meanwhile, Tufton yesterday opened a \$1-million molecular biology laboratory, which he said would allow his ministry to test for genetic and infectious diseases caused by microorganisms.