

# Swine-flu outbreak could be linked to Smithfield factory farms

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A flu strain—a nasty mash-up of swine, avian, and human viruses—has infected 1,000 people in Mexico and the U.S., killing 68. The World Health Organization [warned](#) Saturday that the outbreak could reach global pandemic levels.

Is Smithfield Foods, the world's largest pork packer and hog producer, linked to the outbreak? Smithfield operates massive hog-raising operations Perote, Mexico, in the state of Vera Cruz, where the outbreak originated. The operations, grouped under a Smithfield subsidiary called Granjas Carroll, raise 950,000 hogs per year, according to the [company Web site](#).

On Friday, the U.S. disease-tracking blog [Biosurveillance](#) published a timeline of the outbreak containing this nugget, dated April 6 (*major tip of the hat to Paula Hay, who alerted me to the Smithfield link on the Comfood listserv and has [written about it](#) on her blog, [Peak Oil Entrepreneur](#)*):

Residents [of Perote] believed the outbreak had been caused by contamination from pig breeding farms located in the area. They believed that the farms, operated by Granjas Carroll, polluted the atmosphere and local water bodies, which in turn led to the disease outbreak. According to residents, the company denied responsibility for the outbreak and attributed the cases to "flu." However, a municipal health official stated that preliminary investigations indicated that the disease vector was a type of fly that reproduces in pig waste and that the outbreak was linked to the pig farms. It was unclear whether health officials had identified a suspected pathogen responsible for this outbreak.

From what I can tell, the possible link to Smithfield has not been reported in the U.S. press. Searches of Google News and the websites of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* all came up empty. The link is being made in the Mexican media, however. "Granjas Carroll, causa de epidemia en La Gloria," [declared](#) a headline in the Vera Cruz-based paper *La Marcha*. No need to translate that, except to point out that La Gloria is the village where the outbreak seems to have started. Judging from the article, Mexican authorities treat hog CAFOs with just as much if not more indulgence than their peers north of the border, to the detriment of surrounding communities and the general public health. Get this:

De acuerdo con uno de los habitantes de la comunidad, Eli Ferrer Cortés, los desechos fecales y orgánicos que produce Granjas Carroll no son tratados

adecuadamente, lo que genera contaminación del agua y del viento en la region.

My rough translation: According to one community resident, the organic and fecal waste produced by Granjas Carrol isn't adequately treated, creating water and air pollution in the region. I witnessed—and smelled—the [same thing](#) in Hardin County, Iowa, a couple of years ago, another area marked by intensive industrial hog production. The article goes on to say that area residents have long complained of "fetid odors" in the air and water, and swarms of flies hovering around waste lagoons. Like their counterparts who live in CAFO-heavy U.S. areas, they also complain of respiratory ailments. Now, with 30 percent of the area's residents now infected with the virulent flu bug, people are demanding that state and federal authorities inspect hog operations there. So far, reports *La Marcha*, the response has been: *nada*.

The Mexico City daily *La Jornada* has also [made the link](#). According to the newspaper, the Mexican health agency IMSS has acknowledged that the original carrier for the flu could be the "clouds of flies" that multiply in the Smithfield subsidiary's manure lagoons.

I'll be in touch with contacts in Mexico as this story develops —and I'll be curious to see whether the U.S. media explores the link with Smithfield's Mexico operation.

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