

**For discussion
on 23 April 2001**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**CONTROL OF LOCAL AND IMPORTED
FOOD AND LIVE FOOD ANIMALS**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the control measures imposed by the Administration on local and imported live food animals, and imported chilled/frozen meat and poultry for the protection of public health.

Background

2. Every year, Hong Kong consumes around 42.9 million live chicken, 7.3 million other poultry, 2.3 million pigs, 60 000 cattle and 4 500 goats. Among these, 36.2 million chicken, 1.8 million pigs, almost all other poultry, all cattle and goats are imported, and all are from the Mainland. Importation of live food animals, regardless from which places or countries, are subject to stringent import control and have to comply with the requirements laid down in the relevant laws of Hong Kong. Local farms only produce poultry (mainly chickens) and pigs.

Control of Live Poultry

3. Importation of live poultry is governed by the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations of the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance (Cap. 139). Official health certificates from recognized veterinary authorities are required for the importation. The certificate must certify that

- (i) the poultry consignment concerned shows no clinical signs of diseases;

- (ii) the poultry consignment concerned has not been kept at premises where there is serological or virological evidence of H5 avian influenza infection within the last 180 days;
- (iii) the poultry consignment concerned has been segregated from other birds for 5 days immediately preceding the day on which the certificate is issued; and
- (iv) samples taken from the poultry consignment have been tested by the veterinary authority of the exporting place to be free from H5 virus no more than 5 days before the exportation.

The Regulations also stipulate that live poultry can only be imported via designated checks points to facilitate our import control work and physical inspection. Special conditions pertaining to storage and transportation are also laid down to minimize any potential health risks e.g. to prevent transmissions and spread of infectious diseases.

4. All live chickens enter into Hong Kong by land through Man Kam To, while most live waterfowls come by sea and land to the Western Food Wholesale Market. The staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) stationed at these entry points inspect every consignment and verify the content of the accompanying health certificate. Blood samples are collected randomly from each consignment and sent for laboratory testing of H5 avian influenza antibodies. Poultry consignments will be withheld in wholesale markets¹ until the laboratory results are available, which usually take around half a day.

5. Regarding local poultry, all local poultry farms are inspected regularly to ensure that high farm hygiene standards are maintained. Every consignment of local poultry is tested within 7 days prior to sale to ensure that the poultry are free from infection with H5 influenza virus. Last year, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) conducted over 3 050 visits to poultry farms.

¹ Wholesale markets for waterfowls and other poultry are Western Wholesale Food Market and Cheung Shan Wan Wholesale Food Market respectively.

Control of Live Pigs, Cattle And Goats

6. Similar to live poultry, we require all consignments of imported live pigs, cattle and goats to be accompanied by official health certificates, confirming that the animals are free from any infectious diseases. To enhance the general safety control framework of all imported food animals, we have in co-operation with the State Administration for Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine (CIQ SA) introduced an animal identification and tracing system. Under the system, only CIQ registered farms are permitted to export food animals into Hong Kong. CIQ SA specifies the registration requirements that are followed by all Provincial and City CIQs. Farms have to attain the stipulated hygiene standards and have implemented detailed disease surveillance and control programmes supervised by on-farm veterinarians before they can be registered and approved for export into Hong Kong. All imported food animals now bear distinctive identification numbers (through tattoo on pigs and ear tag on cattle and goats) so that their origins can be traced. Upon entry into Hong Kong, FEHD would verify the animal health certificates and the identification numbers, and inspect the animals for any clinical signs of diseases.

7. Hong Kong has no cattle or goat industry. Regarding control over local pigs, AFCD inspects all local pig farms regularly and investigates fully all reported outbreaks of disease. In addition, they provide up to date advice on vaccination programmes to pig farmers based on applied research conducted in Hong Kong. Last year, over 2000 visits were conducted to 330 local active pig farms for checks on farm hygiene, use of chemicals, disease and livestock waste treatment facilities. In accordance with a voluntary scheme worked out with the co-operation of the industry, all pigs from local farms must be tattooed with a unique identification number. All consignments of local pigs are tested and proved to be free from the chemical clenbuterol before being sent for slaughter.

8. In the light of the series of clenbuterol food poisoning cases in the last few years, a urine surveillance scheme targeted at clenbuterol has been introduced on pigs. Urine sample is collected from each consignment at the slaughterhouse and the entire consignment is withheld from slaughtering (and hence release into the market) until satisfactory laboratory result on clenbuterol is available, which usually takes half a day.

9. We intend to make a new regulation later this year to strengthen the control over the use of chemicals in food animals. This regulation will prohibit the use in food animals of seven chemicals including clenbuterol that may be harmful to man. It will also stipulate the maximum levels of 37 other agricultural and veterinary chemicals that are permitted in meat and offal when animals are slaughtered. The voluntary pig tattoo scheme mentioned in paragraph 7 above will also be formalized under the new regulation.

Radiation Monitoring

10. In order to ensure food animals are not contaminated by radioactive substances, three sets of Livestock Contamination Monitoring System are installed at Man Kam To Animal Inspection Station, Lok Ma Chau Livestock Monitoring Station, and Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse, to regularly monitor the prevalent level of radiation in imported pigs, cattle and goats.

Control of Imported Chilled/Frozen Meat and Poultry

11. The import of chilled/frozen meat and poultry is governed by the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations (IGMPR) under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). IGMPR requires that imported chilled/frozen meat and poultry should be accompanied with an official health certificate issued by a competent authority recognised by Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene. The official health certificate should certify that the chilled/frozen meat and poultry is fit for human consumption. All the chilled/frozen meat and poultry should enter through Man Kam To if the import is via land, or the International Airport of Hong Kong if the import is via air. Imports from the Mainland may also be effected by river boats and the commodities would be inspected at designated checkpoints. At these checkpoints, FEHD staff would verify the official health certificates. The food concerned may also be subject to inspection or sampling by the Department.

Combat Against Smuggling

12. To curb illegal import of live food animals, and chilled/frozen meat and poultry, AFCD and FEHD maintain close liaison with the Customs and Excise Department for intelligence sharing and assist them in anti-smuggling enforcement. A range of domestic and exotic food animal species have been seized including chicken, food turtles, duck, teal, quail, francolin, chukar and pigs. Chilled/frozen meat and poultry have also been seized during operations against illegal import of such commodities.

**Environment and Food Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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