

**For discussion
on 30 November 2001**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Notification Mechanism on Food Safety Matters between HKSAR and the Mainland

Introduction

This paper briefs Members on the notification mechanism between Hong Kong and the Mainland on food safety matters.

Existing Notification Mechanism on Food-related Incidents

2. The Mainland is the major source of imported food in Hong Kong. Live food animals imported from the Mainland account for over 80% of the local live food animal market, whereas about 40% of the other major fresh food produce comes from the Mainland every year. Therefore, it is very important to ensure the safety of food imported from the Mainland in order to safeguard public health in Hong Kong. As such, we have been maintaining close liaison with the concerned Mainland authorities in respect of food safety matters.

3. To promote public health in the Mainland and Hong Kong, to prevent the spread of plant and animal diseases and pests and to ensure the quality of imports and exports, the Environment and Food Bureau and the State Administration for Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine (now known as “the State General Administration of the People’s Republic of China for Quality Supervision and Inspection and Quarantine”) ratified the mechanism for the co-operation between the two sides in food safety and plant and animal inspection and quarantine in September 2000.

4. Under this mechanism, Hong Kong have held a number of expert group meetings with the Mainland side to discuss the inspection and quarantine work of the two places, covering topics like food animals, meat and poultry imported to Hong Kong and savoury sauces. We shared our working experience and testing techniques with them with a view to more effectively ensuring the safety of food imported to Hong Kong. In addition, the two sides have also exchanged views on new food-related issues such as genetically-modified food. After the latest outbreak of avian influenza, we organized a seminar with the Mainland side to brief them on a series of new measures that we put in place for the prevention, monitoring and control of avian influenza and share with them the testing techniques for avian influenza viruses. Besides, we always notify the Mainland side whenever new food-related policies and legislation are introduced. In respect of the regulations recently enacted for the control over feeding food animals with chemicals, we have also reached a consensus with the Mainland on the future operation and notification mechanism.

5. As for the control of food-related incidents, a standing notification mechanism proven to be effective is already in place between Hong Kong and the Mainland regarding imported livestock, poultry and vegetables. In case of such food-related incidents, we would quickly contact the Mainland, which would then follow up the case to ensure the safety of food exported to Hong Kong.

6. In addition, when we receive information from the media or other sources about a food incident involving food imported from the Mainland, which may be hazardous to public health, we will contact the concerned Mainland authorities immediately to investigate into the alleged incident. If the incident is confirmed, discussions about the follow-up actions would be held between the two sides so as to safeguard public health.

Latest Development

7. On 10 April this year, the State Council announced the merging of the State Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision and the State Administration

for Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine to form the State General Administration of the People's Republic of China for Quality Supervision and Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ), with a view to strengthening quality supervision and entry-exit inspection and quarantine work. The AQSIQ is an administrative organ responsible for quality, metrology, entry-exit commodity inspection, entry-exit health and quarantine, entry-exit animal and plant quarantine, certification and accreditation, and standardization for the whole nation and also law-enforcement in these areas. In August this year, the Import and Export Food Safety Bureau was established under the AQSIQ. Its responsibilities include the inspection, quarantine, supervision and management of import and export food items, assessment of food hygiene risks and implementation of urgent preventive measures, and investigation of serious incidents related to the hygiene and quality standard of imported and exported food items.

8. To further enhance the communication between Hong Kong and the Mainland regarding food-related incidents, we have reached a consensus with the newly established Import and Export Food Safety Bureau to set up a mechanism for notification and liaison between the two sides. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the new Import and Export Food Safety Bureau will each appoint a liaison officer so that each side will be able to notify the other side more promptly of food-related incidents that may affect the other side. Follow-up actions can then be taken. In addition, the two sides will also exchange essential information on legislation and technical standards governing the safety inspection and quarantine of food, notify each other of news and information regarding food exported to Hong Kong, and consult each other to solve problems encountered by both sides in the safety inspection and quarantine of food. The two sides have also agreed to organize seminars, training sessions and academic conferences, and jointly conduct scientific research so as to further facilitate the exchange of food inspection and quarantine techniques and enhance co-operation in this respect.

Conclusion

9. Under the above mechanism, we can effectively maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities concerned, and both sides are able to notify each other on food safety issues and take proper follow-up actions with a view to ensuring food safety.

Environment and Food Bureau
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November 2001