

## **LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

### **Sanitary and Food Safety Standard of Chilled Chickens Imported from the Mainland**

At the special meeting held on 2 October 2002, the Panel asked the Administration to provide information on –

- (a) whether foreign countries have stipulated that chilled chickens must have their heads and necks removed for public health reasons; and
- (b) whether exported chilled chickens from the Mainland to other places have their heads and necks removed.

The relevant information and the progress of preparation for the import of chilled chickens from the Mainland are set out below.

#### **Sanitary Requirements for Chilled Chickens in Other Places**

2. In the Code of Hygienic Practice For Poultry Processing recommended by the **Codex Alimentarius Commission of the United Nations** (the authority that lays down international standards for food safety and hygiene), there is no mandatory requirement that chilled chickens must have their heads and necks removed before releasing for sale. As we understand, the European Union, New Zealand and Singapore also do not stipulate for the removal of heads and necks of chilled chickens for public health reasons. However, some countries, for example, the United States and Australia, do have such a requirement but they have put in place an exemption mechanism to allow for chilled chickens with their heads and necks to be sold. In general, retail shops in the above countries do not sell live poultry and all live poultry are centrally slaughtered. In a nutshell, the specifications for chilled chickens for sale are not standardized as they are much related to the needs and local dietary habits of individual places.

3. As what we have mentioned before, heads and necks of chilled chickens do not constitute a particularly high risk in terms of food safety and public hygiene. Furthermore, the Codex Alimentarius Commission has not laid down any standards for removing heads and necks of chilled chickens. Therefore, we have no scientific grounds to make the removal of chilled chickens' heads and necks as a mandatory import requirement.

### **Chilled Chickens Exported from the Mainland to Other Places**

4. As far as we know, the Mainland exports chilled chickens to Japan and South Korea. To cater for the demand of these markets, only chicken parts (e.g. chicken breasts) but not whole chickens are exported. However, the Mainland has exported whole frozen chickens with heads and necks to other places like the Middle East and Russia.

### **Differentiation of Chilled Chickens**

5. We understand that both the Panel and the trade are very concerned about the possibility that individual retailers may pose chilled chicken as freshly slaughtered chickens for sale. To protect consumers' right, members view that there should be ways to differentiate chilled chickens from those freshly slaughtered. As we mentioned at the Panel meeting on 16 September 2002, the general public should be able to differentiate the two as the external characteristics of chilled chickens and freshly slaughtered chickens are different. Nonetheless, we have kept on reflecting the concerns of the Panel and the trade to the relevant Mainland authorities. In order to promote the branding of chilled chickens and meet the demand of consumers, the Mainland has agreed to put an edible and colourfast red stamp, an international common practice for labelling meat and poultry, near the chicken wing area. The stamp, together with the label of security hologram with the letters 'CIQ', should effectively address the identification problem to protect consumers' right and tackle the smuggling of chilled chickens. FEHD officers will step up inspection of stalls/shops selling live chickens and enhance collection of intelligence

to combat against any breaches of the licensing requirements/tenancy conditions regarding storage and display of chilled chickens. FEHD will also consider imposing stricter penalties to enhance the deterrent effect.

### **Preparation for the Import of Chilled Chickens**

6. FEHD has completed the inspection of the processing plants in the Mainland which have expressed interests in exporting chilled chickens to Hong Kong in the first phase. We expect that there will be seven processing plants meeting our sanitary requirements in the early December which can supply chilled chickens to Hong Kong.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau**  
**Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**  
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