

**For discussion
on 19 December 2002**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Progress on the Follow-up of
the Recommendations in the Investigation Team Report
for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of our follow-up of the recommendations in the Investigation Team Report for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident.

Outcome of the Consultation

2. The Investigation Team appointed by the then Secretary for the Environment and Food to look into the 2002 avian influenza incident published its report in late May 2002. The Team recommended the following major measures to reduce the risk of recurrence of avian influenza outbreaks –

- (a) improving the biosecurity standard of local farms to reduce the risk of incursion of virus onto farms (the recommended measures are at **Annex A**);
- (b) introducing an additional "rest day" per month at retail stalls/shops to further reduce the virus load and to synchronize the rest days of both wholesale and retail markets; and
- (c) reviewing the effectiveness of vaccination before establishing its role in the control of H5N1 avian influenza virus in Hong Kong.

The Report also noted that the import of Mainland chilled chickens would resume and that a reduction in the demand for live poultry and in the volume of the live poultry trade would reduce the risk of H5N1 infection.

3. The Administration consulted the public on the Investigation Team's recommendations in June to August 2002. A total of 13 written submissions from the Heung Yee Kuk, the Democratic Party, a LegCo Member, live poultry trade's associations, medical associations, the Consumer Council, a major supermarket chain, and an individual academic, had been received. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) also sought views from all District Councils on the recommendations.

4. Most of the submissions and District Councillors gave general support for upgrading the biosecurity standard of local farms. Live chicken farmers and the Heung Yee Kuk, however, considered the proposed biosecurity measures impractical and that they would only add to the financial burden on farmers. One group of poultry wholesalers objected to the use of an additional set of transport cages as they considered that the problem should be better tackled by improved cleaning and disinfection of existing cages.

5. Nearly all the submissions from the live poultry trade opposed to any move by the Administration to import chilled chickens to provide an alternative to live chickens. They considered that such a move would seriously affect the live chicken trade and reduce Hong Kong's attractiveness to lovers of fresh food. However, the Consumer Council, a medical association and an individual academic supported that the provision of chilled poultry products will help reduce the chance of avian influenza outbreak.

6. Nearly all submissions opposed the introduction of an additional rest day per month. Most of them considered that it would cause severe hardship to the live poultry trade. The Consumer Council and one medical association supported the proposal. The need to improve market hygiene was also raised in a number of District Council Meetings and in the submissions from the medical associations.

7. Two medical associations considered that Government should continue to review the effectiveness of vaccination before taking any views on its role in the control of H5N1 avian influenza virus in Hong Kong. However, one group of poultry wholesalers and a joint

submission from a LegCo member and other live poultry trade's associations recommended routine vaccination as they believed that vaccination would help protect birds from the virus.

Progress of the Follow-up

(a) Upgrading the Biosecurity Standard of Local Farms

8. To control the 2002 outbreak, AFCD has banned direct sales from farms to markets to prevent viruses from getting back to farms through equipment and people movement. Any farmer who sells chickens direct to retail markets will have his licence cancelled immediately. The same applies to retailers who buy chickens from sources other than the wholesale market. A number of additional biosecurity measures including some recommended by the Investigation Team have also been imposed on the licences after the outbreak. A list of these measures is at **Annex B**. All the 157 licensed chicken farms have already implemented the key biosecurity measures. They are now taking steps to upgrade bird cages from wooden to plastic or metal ones, and set up bird proofing facilities to prevent wild birds from entering the chicken sheds. As of December 2002, AFCD has cancelled the licences of eight farms for not meeting the requirements.

9. AFCD is also closely monitoring the situation of local farms. Every chicken farm is inspected at least once every two weeks. Intensive virus monitoring is conducted on farms through testing of blood and dead chickens. During farm inspection, AFCD staff conduct chicken counts and check for missing chickens to ensure that there is no direct sale of chickens to retail markets. In addition, the biosecurity standard and overall farm hygiene condition are audited. One-to-one training on biosecurity for the farmer and workers, as well as advisory service on how to improve individual farm biosecurity plans are provided. Besides, AFCD also imposes strict control over the licensed farming capacity including control on the import of day old chickens.

10. We understand that some farmers would have practical difficulties in implementing all biosecurity measures recommended by the Investigation Team. We have considered the effectiveness of the remaining measures in risk reduction and have identified the more effective ones to be implemented with a higher priority. A list of these measures are at **Annex C**. Implementation of these high priority measures will be tied in with the development of individual biosecurity

plans for farms, taking into account the physical attributes and operation of individual farms. AFCD is working out the biosecurity plans for individual farms with farmers. It is expected that all farms will have largely implemented the plans by April 2003.

11. Some farms have been operating on illegally occupied Government land, either in whole or in part, for years. We understand that these farmers may be reluctant to inject capital resources to rebuild their farm structures to implement the new biosecurity measures as there is no proper land tenure for their farms. To facilitate these farmers to undertake improvement to their farms for public health reasons, the Lands Department will be prepared to consider applications from farmers for regularizing the land status of their farm structures by way of Short Term Tenancy when the farmers plan to rebuild such structures.

(b) Resumption of import of chilled chickens from the Mainland

12. The Mainland started to resume export of chilled chickens to Hong Kong in early December. The average daily number of Mainland chilled chickens imported to Hong Kong between 6 and 12 December is about 20 000, whereas the average daily number of live chickens consumed in Hong Kong remains at approximately 112 000. The availability of Mainland chilled chickens in the market has increased consumers' choice. Whether this will in the long run reduce the volume of live poultry trade depends very much on consumers' preference. We will let consumers' choice determine the balance between chilled and live chickens.

(c) Additional rest days at retail outlets

13. The large number of live chickens that mix and congregate at live poultry markets creates favorable conditions for avian influenza viruses to flourish and thrive there. To minimize the risk of H5N1 viruses posed to public health, it is therefore important to reduce the virus load at these markets and further improve market hygiene. There is scientific evidence showing that the monthly rest day is effective in reducing the virus load at live poultry markets. However, we appreciate the worries that poultry retailers have about the impact of an additional rest day per month on the business of the live poultry trade, particularly in the present business environment. We are giving due consideration to the need for this measure and will continue to maintain close dialogue with the trade on the issue.

14. While we have yet to decide on whether an additional rest day per month should be implemented, we have put in place the following measures after consultation with the trade to reduce the risk of avian influenza outbreak in live poultry retail outlets –

- (a) we will continue to collect swabs from dead or dying chickens from live poultry stalls for testing. If H5 avian influenza virus is found, all chickens in the stall in question must be slaughtered and the stall must cease business and be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected to the satisfaction of the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene;
- (b) we will carry out strict enforcement of the licensing/tenancy condition on over-stocking in order to ensure that live chickens will not stay for too long at the retail outlets. This will help minimize the risk of spread of disease amongst the chicken population and improve overall market hygiene; and
- (c) we will implement additional rest days at times of high chicken consumption and increase the frequency of intensive cleansing and disinfection. For the Winter season spanning from December 2002 to February 2003, we will implement an additional rest day on 10 January 2003 and will add 15 days of intensive cleansing and disinfection.

(d) Vaccination

15. The Administration introduced a vaccination programme on a trial basis to all farms in the Pak Sha area in April 2002 as a supplementary measure to control the 2002 outbreak. We have been closely monitoring the situation of the vaccinated farms and undertaking study to evaluate the effectiveness of vaccine against the local strains of H5N1 virus. So far, the study results reveal that the vaccine currently being used in Hong Kong can help prevent mortality and disease associated with local strains of H5N1 virus in vaccinated chickens. To facilitate us to gather more data to evaluate the role of vaccination in the control of H5N1 avian influenza in Hong Kong, we are considering to extending the trial programme by also vaccinating the chickens in farms

in the vicinity of Pak Sha. We will continue to analyze the results of the trial scheme.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

December 2002

**Biosecurity measures recommended in the Report of
the Investigation Team for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident**

1. Farmers have to adjust their mindset to critically assess the risk they are being exposed to, and implement appropriate biosecurity measures.
2. The chicken production area should be solidly fenced.
3. The chicken production area needs to have a separate and independent entrance from that of the farm residence to prevent trespassing through the chicken production area.
4. Equipment, particularly cages brought into the chicken production area, must be completely disinfected.
5. There should be shower and changing facilities for workers and visitors entering the chicken production area. No one should be allowed to enter the production areas unless they have showered and changed, or covered fully in suitable disposal protective clothing.
6. The undercarriage of vehicles entering the farm should be completely disinfected.
7. Movement of feed or equipment between farms should be stopped unless these have been properly disinfected.
8. Movement of poultry between farms should be prohibited except under exceptional circumstances and governed by permits imposing stringent conditions.
9. Chicken farms and their workers must avoid direct contact with any place housing poultry, especially poultry markets where large number of live birds mix and congregate.

10. Chickens within farm should be segregated by age groups and each shed should contain only one age group.
11. Chicken sheds should be completely emptied between batches of poultry and thoroughly cleansed, disinfected and spelled for a minimum of 7 days before restocking.
12. Chicken farms must keep full production records covering drug and vaccine use, feed consumption, mortality and stock movement to markets.
13. A separate set of colour coded cages should be used for transporting birds from local farms to wholesale markets to help reduce cross-contamination between markets and farms.

**Biosecurity measures already imposed on the licences
after the 2002 outbreak**

1. No farms are allowed to sell chickens direct to retail markets. Only washed cages from wholesale market can be used for transporting chickens from farms to the wholesale market.
2. The chicken production area should be clearly segregated from the area for feed delivery and storage.
3. Disinfecting bath or other disinfecting equipment should be installed at farm gate to ensure that all equipment entering the farm is clean.
4. Movement of poultry between farms should be prohibited except under exceptional circumstances and governed by permits.
5. Farms should only let wholesalers who visit one farm per day enter their farms to collect chickens.
6. Chicken sheds should be bird-proof
7. Different batches of chickens should be separated.
8. Cages housing birds should be upgraded as appropriate to improve overall farm hygiene.
9. Disinfectant pool should be provided at the entrance of each shed.
10. Farms should have a designated area for loading chickens.
11. There should be designated workers for specific sheds.
12. Farms should have a designated area for placing faecal waste bins and the bins should be disinfected before returning to the farms.

Measures to be implemented with a higher priority

1. There should be showering facilities for farm workers and/or workers should change their clothing completely before entering farms.
2. A suitable barrier should be established between production and non-production areas on farms. If this cannot be implemented due to the physical constraints of farms, farmers should segregate the production area and redesign their routine to reduce trespassing.
3. Farm workers should be prevented from going directly from markets to farms.
4. Solid fencing should be erected on external boundaries of farms that face public roads or other livestock farms.
5. Chicken sheds should best be completely emptied between batches of poultry. In any cases, farms should achieve “all out” for whole sections of a shed which are clearly delineated from other areas in the shed.
6. Emptied sheds/sections should be thoroughly cleansed, disinfected and left vacant for 7 days before restocking.
7. Where possible, chickens within farm should be segregated by age groups and each should contain only one age group.
8. Farmers should separate their production area from residence and redesign their routine to reduce trespassing.
9. Movement of livestock feed from one farm to another would not be allowed except under a permit.
10. Where possible, there should not be shared entry for farms. In any cases, farmers should not enter the production areas of the other.

11. Farmers are required to keep production records including the use of drugs and vaccine, feed consumption, mortality and stock movement to markets.
12. The cage washing system at the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market should be enhanced to ensure that all cages are cleansed properly and treated with a disinfectant capable of killing H5 virus.
13. Farmers should change their mindset to recognize the risks posed to their farms by people, poultry or items outside their farms.