

Press Release

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Consensus reached to enhance safety of Mainland food for supply to Hong Kong

Consensus was reached at a meeting today (August 23) between the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, Dr York Chow, and the Minister of the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ), Mr Li Changjiang, in Beijing, on supply of Mainland pork, the notification mechanism in respect of food incident and arrangements for the import and export of aquatic products to Hong Kong.

Representatives of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had held initial discussions and exchanged views yesterday with AQSIQ representatives.

At today's meeting, Dr Chow and Mr Li reaffirmed the results of the discussions between the two sides, which would further safeguard the safety of food for supply to Hong Kong and enhance the communication between Mainland and Hong Kong.

On supply of Mainland pork to Hong Kong, AQSIQ confirmed at today's meeting that the Streptococcus suis outbreak in Sichuan Province had been under control. The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) also confirmed that there was no outbreak of Streptococcus suis infection in Henan Province.

HWFB today received reports from veterinary officers sent by the Government to Sichuan confirming that the pig farms supplying pork to Hong Kong was operating normally, the conditions there were satisfactory and the methods of feeding also met the requirements for export to Hong Kong.

The two sides agreed to process the applications of pork import from Sichuan Province, Henan Province and Shenzhen starting tomorrow (August 24) so that pork supply in Hong Kong would resume normal.

Dr Chow pointed out that Sichuan Province and Henan Province were Hong Kong's main sources of pork supply, accounting for 40 per cent and 20 per cent of the local market respectively. It was anticipated that the decision could satisfy market demand.

On food safety notification system, the two sides held constructive discussion and unanimously agreed to strengthen the mutual ties.

Dr Chow said experiences showed that the communication and notification system between Hong Kong and AQSIQ have been good and effective, which facilitated information exchange and co-operation in regard to inspection and quarantine measures between the two places. Having regard to the recent malachite green incident, both sides agreed to further enhance the notification in respect of major incidents in relation to export of food.

He said MOA as well as Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council have pledged their support for the establishment of communication channels and have direct contact with agricultural authorities in Guangdong Province and Shenzhen on issues of food safety that might affect Hong Kong.

"We will arrange special meetings with Guangdong, Shenzhen and Zhuhai Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau as soon as possible to discuss food safety issues of mutual concern. This is in line with the cooperation arrangements laid down by AQSIQ. According to the current arrangements, the Government of the Hong Kong Special

Administrative Region will meet with the relevant Mainland inspection and quarantine authorities at least once a year.

"Both sides also discussed the recent malachite green incident in detail at today's meeting. AQSIQ reassured us that malachite green has been prohibited for use in all registered fish farms for supply to Hong Kong. . They will strengthen the monitoring and inspection to ensure freshwater fish and aquatic products for supply to Hong Kong are free from malachite green," he said.

Dr Chow noted there have been difficulties in carrying out live fish inspection as the goods have to be delivered from the source (fish farms) to retail outlets (markets) in the shortest period of time. The inspection at boundary checkpoints or wholesale markets could only be carried out in limited manner. To satisfy public demand, daily supplies of live fish amounted to dozens of tonnes. Therefore, the most effective way was to control at sources.

To further strengthen the safety of freshwater fish supply to Hong Kong, the two sides agreed that the most effective measure was to control at sources. The following actions would be taken:

- * Freshwater fish supply to Hong Kong can only be provided by fish farms which are registered in the Mainland and approved by FEHD;

- * All freshwater fish supplied by registered and approved farms should be accompanied with certificates when entering Hong Kong to prove that they are free from malachite green or any other harmful pesticide and chemical substances;

- * FEHD can send staff to registered and approved freshwater fish and aquaculture farms in the Mainland for inspection;

- * Exchange on freshwater fish farming and aquaculture technique will be strengthened between Hong Kong and the

Mainland; arrangements will be made for technical staff to visit each other and exchange experiences; and
* Hong Kong will study legislative amendments to require imported aquatic products to seek prior approval.

Dr Chow said: "The new arrangements on inspection and quarantine will further ensure the safety of freshwater fish supply to Hong Kong, thereby enhancing public confidence in consuming these products."

He said the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations in the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance would be amended to prohibit the use of malachite green in food to further enhance the safety of freshwater fish supply for public consumption.

"We will continue to monitor the latest situation on the regulation on the use of chemical substances in agricultural and fisheries products in other countries. We will regularly update the First Schedule of the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations," Dr Chow said.

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(As at August 23, 2005)

Test results of 44 freshwater fish samples

<u>Types</u>	<u>Claimed Source</u>	<u>Number of samples</u>	<u>Presence of malachite green</u>
Big Head	Local	3	Negative
	Imported	6	Two positive samples (1.9; 6 μ g/kg)
Grass Carp	Local	3	Negative
	Imported	7	Two positive samples (18; 43 μ g/kg)
Edible Goldfish	Local	1	Negative
	Imported	3	Two positive sample (1.8; 3.2 μ g/kg)
Grey Mullet	Local	3	Negative
	Imported	1	Negative
Tilapia	Local	2	Negative
	Imported	1	Negative
Freshwater Grouper	Local	--	--
	Imported	3	Three positive samples (1.2; 64; 900 μ g/kg)
Common Carp	Local	--	--
	Imported	1	One positive sample (30 μ g/kg)
Milk Fish	Local	--	--
	Imported	1	Negative
Seabass	Local	--	--
	Imported	1	Negative
Cat Fish	Local	--	--
	Imported	2	One positive sample (2.0 μ g/kg)
Mud Carp	Local	--	--
	Imported	3	Negative
Snake Head	Local	--	--
	Imported	1	One positive sample (10 μ g/kg)

<u>Types</u>	<u>Claimed Source</u>	<u>Number of samples</u>	<u>Presence of malachite green</u>
Large Mouth Bass	Local	--	--
	Imported	1	One positive sample (2.9 μ g/kg)
Yellow eel	Local	--	--
	Imported	1	Negative

Summary of results:

1. A total of 44 samples were tested.
2. A total of 13 samples were found to be positive.
3. A total of 31 samples were found to be negative.