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the Administration)

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of Special Meeting
held on Thursday, 20 April 2006 at 4:00 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, JP
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
- Members attending** : Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Daniel LAM Wai-keung, BBS, JP
- Members absent** : Hon WONG Yung-kan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
- Public officers Attending** : Item I
Mrs Carrie YAU
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Wallace LAU
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) 1
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mrs Stella HUNG
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Mr K K LIU
Assistant Director (Agriculture and Administration)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Thomas CHUNG
Assistant Director (Food Surveillance and Control)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr LEE Wai-ching
Senior Superintendent (Food Surveillance and Certification)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr CHOW Kwong
Assistant Commissioner
Customs and Excise Department

Mr LI Chun-fai
Senior Superintendent
Customs and Excise Department

Item II

Mrs Carrie YAU
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Wallace LAU
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) 1
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mrs Stella HUNG
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Mr K K LIU
Assistant Director (Agriculture and Administration)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Thomas CHUNG
Assistant Director (Food Surveillance and Control)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr LEE Wai-ching
Senior Superintendent (Food Surveillance and Certification)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Attendance by : Item II
invitation

PARKnSHOP

Mr Philippe GIARD
Managing Director, Hong Kong

Mr Peter JOHNSTON
General Manager
Quality, Food Safety and Regulatory Affairs

The Wellcome Company Limited

Mr David BOUND
Supply Chain and Fresh Food Director

Mr Stephen CHEN
Fresh Food Group Category Manager

Clerk in : Mrs Constance LI
Attendance Chief Council Secretary (2)5

Staff in : Miss Betty MA
Attendance Senior Council Secretary (2)1

Ms Anna CHEUNG
Legislative Assistant (2)5

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I Progress report on the regulation of freshwater fish from the Mainland
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 1774/05-06(04) and 1789/05-06(01)]

The Chairman said that it was reported in the newspaper that fish from unregistered fish farms in the Mainland were unloaded and distributed at Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market at midnight. He was shocked to learn from the Government press release that there were 76 cases of freshwater fish imports not being accompanied with health certificates issued by the Mainland authorities, as this posed health risk to the public. The Administration was therefore invited to give an account of the incidents at this special meeting.

2. Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (PS(HWF)) said that following the discovery of malachite green in freshwater fish supplied to Hong Kong last year, the Administration had reached agreement with the Mainland authorities that only registered farms approved by the Mainland authorities could export freshwater fish to Hong Kong, and that every consignment of fishery products must be accompanied with a health certificate issued by the authorities concerned to certify that the products did not contain malachite green or any other harmful substances. PS(HWF) further said that since September 2005, about 40 Mainland registered fish farms were allowed to export freshwater fish to Hong Kong. After inspecting more than 10 Mainland fish farms that had applied to export their products to Hong Kong recently, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had informed the Mainland authorities to include these farms in the list of registered farms. She believed that most of freshwater fish sold at local markets were supplied by registered fish farms in the Mainland. PS(HWF) added that the Administration had set up an inter-departmental task force to look into the 76 cases of freshwater fish imports that had not been accompanied with health certificates issued by the relevant Mainland authorities. The Administration would revert to the Panel when the investigation results were available.

3. The Chairman asked whether malachite green was found in the fish in these 76 cases of freshwater fish imports. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Food and Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) said that the cases were still under investigation and detailed information was not yet available.

4. Regarding the monitoring mechanism for import of freshwater fish, DS(FEH) said that as live fish was not regulated as food under existing legislation, the Administration planned to study the need to introduce legislation to include live fish in the regulatory framework after the establishment of the Centre for Food Safety. DS(FEH) further said that in the meantime, the Administration would maintain close

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liaison with the Mainland authorities that only fish from registered fish farms and accompanied with health certificates would be allowed for export to Hong Kong. As Mainland fish would be imported via Man Kam To and the two wholesale markets, inspection would be conducted at these import points for checking health certificate and testing where appropriate to ensure that such fish was free of malachite green. DS(FEH) said that the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) also inspected imported fish at borders to intercept fishery products that were not accompanied by manifests. Such fishery products would be held and tested by FEHD to ensure that no fishery products imports contained malachite green or other harmful substances. The law enforcement departments would closely monitor such activities and strengthen intelligence work to prevent unauthorised freshwater fish from entering Hong Kong. DS(FEH) stressed that pending the introduction of legislation to regulate aquatic and fishery products, the inter-departmental task force was considering ways to further improve the existing monitoring mechanism.

5. Assistant Commissioner/C&ED (AC/C&ED) said that C&ED would work closely with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and FEHD and step up interception efforts at various points of entry to seize freshwater fish imported from the Mainland not accompanied with health certificates. Under the agreed procedures, FEHD would inspect at the border control points those freshwater fish imported by land and air, to check if such imports were accompanied with health certificates. For freshwater fish imported by sea, C&ED would intercept fishery products that were not accompanied by manifests. For freshwater fish that had manifests fishery products but not accompanied by health certificates, the consignments concerned would be subject to “hold and test” by FEHD. AC/C&ED stressed that C&ED liaised closely with FEHD and conducted joint operations to stop fishery products that contained malachite green or other harmful substances from entering Hong Kong.

6. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the recent incidents of unloading and distributing of fish without manifests or health certificates at Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market had revealed a dereliction of duty by the departments concerned. Mr WONG commented that although the Administration had promised to introduce legislation to regulate the import of live fish after the discovery of malachite green in freshwater fish last year, the Administration recently advised that the relevant legislation would only be introduced after the establishment of the Centre for Food Safety. Mr WONG asked whether the lack of monitoring by departments was due to the absence of legislation to regulate the import and landing of live fish.

7. DS(FEH) said that the Administration was actively considering legislative amendments to further strengthen the regulation of aquatic and fishery products. The Administration was studying the regulatory mechanisms in overseas countries, and the feasibility of bringing live fish cultivated in fish farms and fish ponds under regulation. DS(FEH) further said that the Administration had to carefully consider the scope of the regulatory framework and the impact on the affected trades in drawing up

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a reasonable regulatory mechanism. DS(FEH) advised that the Administration planned to submit the regulatory framework to LegCo by the end of 2006.

8. Regarding the management of wholesale market, Assistant Director/AFCD (AD/AFCD) said that there were AFCD staff and security staff stationed in the wholesale market, and closed-circuit television system was installed to monitor the operation of the market. Freshwater fish accompanied by manifests would be allowed to be unloaded at the piers and vehicular loading areas of the wholesale market. However, if such unloaded fish were not accompanied with health certificates, FEHD would be notified and fish samples would be taken for testing to ensure that such fish met the food safety standards. For unloaded fish without manifests, the consignment would be held by C&ED for further action.

9. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that it was reported in the newspaper that nitrofurans, (which had been prohibited for use in freshwater fish in the Mainland since March 2006), was found in some freshwater fish. Mr TAM asked whether nitrofurans was banned in Hong Kong and whether FEHD had conducted tests on the risk posed by nitrofurans to human health. Mr TAM considered that the Administration should conduct risk assessment on such chemicals in food, and obtain more information on the reports of discovery of nitrofurans in fish.

10. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) said that nitrofurans was prohibited for use in meat, but not in food fish. The Administration was obtaining further information on the use and testing of nitrofurans in the Mainland and in overseas countries.

11. Assistant Director/FEHD (AD/FEHD) supplemented that the surveillance on the use of nitrofurans was mainly confined to meat and poultry and there was little information on its use in fish. The Administration was now obtaining more information on the use of nitrofurans in the Mainland and considering further actions to be taken.

12. Mr Vincent FANG said that the Administration had kept informing the public that the import of freshwater fish was subject to a stringent monitoring mechanism. However, the recent discovery of harmful substances in food had weakened public confidence in the safety of food. While he acknowledged the difficulties in detecting smuggling activities given the long coastline of Hong Kong and heavy vehicular traffic at border control points, he considered that the Administration should devise a comprehensive system for taking samples for testing at various levels of the supply chain. Mr FANG suggested that all imported food would be required to be unloaded at designated points for inspection, and the consignments would be sealed after inspection. He believed that the trade would support measures which could restore public confidence in the safety of food supplied to Hong Kong.

13. DS(FEH) said that as Hong Kong practised free trade and 90% of our food

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were imported, it was impossible to conduct food tests for all imported food. A risk-based approach was adopted for food surveillance in that food which posed high risk were inspected and tested before entering Hong Kong, while samples of low-risk food would be taken at retail outlets for testing. It was also not practicable to require all imported food to be unloaded at designated distribution centres for inspection before distribution, particularly if perishable food products were involved. PS(HWF) added that the proposal of setting up designated distribution centres could not solve the problem of illegal imports.

14. DS(FEH) further said that the most effective way to ensure food safety was management at source. The Administration had enhanced cooperation with the Mainland authorities on management at source. He added that after the establishment of the Centre for Food Safety, more resources would be allocated for taking food samples for testing, and for inspection of Mainland pig/poultry farms and meat processing plants which supplied meat and poultry to Hong Kong.

15. Dr Joseph LEE said that it was reported that some freshwater fish exporters in the Mainland mixed fish from unregistered farms with those from registered fish farms for export to Hong Kong. If that was the case, it would be difficult to ascertain the safety of freshwater fish supplied to Hong Kong. He also noted that for fish or fishery products without health certificates, no sample test would be conducted if the traders agreed to destroy the fish or fishery products concerned. Dr LEE asked whether the Administration would step up inspection of registered fish farms in the Mainland and increase the frequency of sample tests of fish and vegetables, in order to restore public confidence in the safety of fish and vegetables supplied to Hong Kong.

16. DS(FEH) said that as a result of the food crises involving freshwater fish and vegetables, they were subject to more stringent monitoring under the food surveillance programme. The Administration was considering possible amendment of legislation to further strengthen the regulation of aquatic food products. The Administration had provided a paper on the proposed regulatory mechanism for vegetables for discussion under item II of this meeting.

17. On the regulation of freshwater fish, DS(FEH) said that while samples would be taken from freshwater fish accompanied with health certificates for testing, the Administration was more concerned about the safety of freshwater fish without health certificates. For freshwater fish without health certificates, samples would be taken for testing of presence of malachite green. If the test findings were satisfactory, such fish would be released for sale. However, information on fish supplies without health certificates would be provided to the Mainland for follow up investigation.

18. In reply to the Chairman, DFEH said that the Mainland authorities would inspect those freshwater fish for supply to Hong Kong before such fish was permitted to enter Hong Kong. Because of resource constraints, FEHD had given priority to food which posed higher risk, for example, freshwater fish without health certificates.

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19. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that he was given the impression that the Administration relied very much on the Mainland authorities to ensure that the fish supplied to Hong Kong was safe for human consumption. He was disappointed that the Administration could not provide information on the number and frequency of sample tests on fish.

20. AD/FEHD responded that more than 60 000 food samples were tested under the regular food surveillance programme, and malachite green was included in the programme since 8 September 2005. About 100 samples had been taken for testing of malachite green so far. FEHD would increase the number of sample tests if necessary.

21. Mr James TO expressed concern about the media reports that triad members were involved in the importation of freshwater fish from unregistered fish farms. Moreover, if the fish traders concerned agreed to destroy the seized fish imports which were not accompanied with health certificates, FEHD would not take enforcement actions against them. He considered that the enforcement departments should take prosecutions against such large-scale “smuggling” activities. He said that the Government should make determined efforts to combat organised crime. Mr TO suggested that the Administration might consider setting up reward for intelligence reports on illegal importation of fish without health certificates.

22. PS(HWF) said that there was no evidence that the seized live freshwater fish without health certificates were unfit for consumption. So far, only one sample was tested positive for trace amounts of malachite green and the whole consignment was subsequently destroyed. The Administration attached great importance to 76 cases of freshwater fish imports that were not accompanied with health certificates, and an inter-departmental task force had been set up to look into the matter. The suggestion of providing incentives for intelligence reporting could be further considered by the inter-departmental task force. PS(HWF) envisaged that with the increase in the number of registered fish farms, supply of freshwater fish from authorised channel would resume to normal level. She stressed that the enforcement departments would step up the surveillance of fish imports, and any freshwater fish imports without health certificates would be subject to “hold and test”.

23. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired about the improvement measures adopted in Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market to deter illegal unloading of fish. PS(HWF) said that a special task force had been formed to conduct 24-hour patrol in the Market.

24. The Chairman expressed concern that illegal importation and unloading activities could shift to other places, and such organised activities were difficult to detect as fish imports could be dispersed quickly. PS(HWF) said that the enforcement departments would step up intelligence work to prevent freshwater fish from entering Hong Kong market illegally.

II Monitoring of chemical levels in vegetables

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 1789/05-06(02)-(04) and CB(2) 1774/05-06(03)-(05)]

25. The Chairman said that there was much public concern about the findings of Greenpeace that residues of banned pesticides were found in a number of vegetables samples obtained from the retail outlets of two major supermarket chains (i.e. PARKnSHOP and Wellcome), while residues of permitted pesticides exceeding the acceptable levels were also found in some samples. The Chairman further said that the Administration and representatives of the two supermarket chains were invited to the meeting to discuss the regulatory mechanism for pesticide residues in fresh vegetables.

26. PS(HWF) advised that at present, over 90% of fresh vegetables supplied to Hong Kong came from the Mainland whilst local produce only accounted for 4%. The Administration took samples at import control points, and also from wholesale and retail markets, for testing of pesticide residues. Of the 20 000 samples of imported vegetables taken by FEHD for testing in 2005, only 10 samples failed to comply with the requirements. PS(HWF) further advised that as agreed with the Mainland authorities, all vegetables supplied to Hong Kong should come from registered farms. Moreover, the Mainland authorities would regularly inspect the registered farms that supplied vegetables to Hong Kong to check on the use of pesticides and conduct sample checks of vegetables.

27. As regards local production, PS(HWF) said that about half of the locally produced vegetables were supplied to the local markets through Vegetable Marketing Organisation (VMO). All vegetables marketed by VMO were also sampled for testing of pesticide residues. The methods, scope and timing of tests adopted by VMO were similar to those of FEHD, and such tests included quick tests and screening for prohibited pesticides. Of the 8 900 samples of local vegetables tested by VMO in the past six months, only six samples were found to have pesticide residues exceeding permitted levels. PS(HWF) added that there was legislation regulating on the possession or use of prohibited pesticides in local farms.

28. PS(HWF) further said that the Administration was obtaining further information from Greenpeace regarding its findings about the presence of prohibited pesticides and residues of permitted pesticides exceeding the acceptable times in vegetables samples obtained from some local supermarkets. The Administration had also urged the management of the supermarkets concerned to improve their tracking systems, to facilitate tracing the sources of their vegetables and other farm produce to safeguard the safety of consumers. PS(HWF) added that the Administration would explore the feasibility of introducing a voluntary registration system for farmers engaged in commercial production of food produce.

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29. The Chairman recalled that the manager of VMO spoke earlier at a radio interview that VMO conducted about 70 000 vegetable sample tests in a year, and 1 300 samples were found to have pesticide residues. However, paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper indicated that VMO tested 8 900 samples of vegetables and six samples were found to have pesticide residues exceeding permitted levels. He sought clarification on the difference in sampling figures.

30. AD/AFCD responded that VMO collected samples of both local vegetables and imported vegetables for testing, and the statistics in the Administration's paper referred to local vegetables. The test was a service provided by VMO for vegetable wholesalers and buyers. He explained that the presence of pesticide residues on vegetables did not necessary mean that such residues exceeded the permitted levels. If the pesticide residues were found exceeded the permitted level, VMO would refer the cases to FEHD for follow-up action. At the request of the Chairman, AD/AFCD agreed to provide information on the number of samples tested by VMO in 2005 that were found to have pesticide residues exceeding permitted levels.

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31. Mr Peter JOHNSTON of PARKnSHOP briefed members on its food safety control system for leafy Chinese vegetables and the actions taken in response to the recent reports on pesticide residues contained in vegetables sold at its stores, as detailed in its submission [LC Paper No. CB(2)1789/05-06(03)]. Mr JOHNSTON said that 80% of its vegetables were sourced from accredited farms in the Mainland, and a Farm Check system had been implemented since 2001 to ensure the safety of such produce. The Farm Check system focused on the control of pesticides, traceability from farm to store and laboratory testing. Up to 72 000 tests were conducted on Chinese vegetables each year. Mr JOHNSTON further said that the low level of pesticides found in the three samples collected from its retail outlets was caused by environmental contamination and a mistake made in harvesting the vegetables earlier than required. After the incident, the company would further improve its testing and source tracing system for its vegetables and other farm produce.

32. Mr David BOUND of Wellcome Company Limited briefed members on the points as detailed in its submission [LC Paper No. CB(2)1789/05-06(04)]. Mr BOUND said that majority of the company's vegetables were sourced from the Mainland nominated farms, and less than 10% were sourced from local wholesale markets. Mr BOUND further said that that after receiving the reports on pesticide residues contained in vegetables sold at their stores, the company had traced and terminated the supply of the affected products, and implemented revised procedure to improve the tracing and testing of produce supplied.

33. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that to enhance transparency of the regulatory mechanism for pesticide residues in fresh vegetables, the Administration should make public the list of registered farms in the Mainland that supplied vegetables to Hong Kong. Mr WONG commented that the Administration should adopt consistent

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practices for regulating pesticide residues in imported vegetables and local produce. At present, while all Mainland vegetables supplied to Hong Kong must come from registered farms, there was no similar requirement for local produce. Moreover, VMO was not empowered to take enforcement action if pesticide residues were found in vegetable samples taken for testing. He also pointed out that only 50 samples of vegetables were taken daily for testing, and leafy vegetables represented a small proportion. Mr WONG urged the Administration to improve the existing regulatory mechanism.

34. DFEH advised that the Administration had been discussing with the Mainland authorities making public the list of vegetable suppliers in the Mainland. He pointed out that the list of suppliers covered a large number of vegetable farms located at different provinces and they were subject to frequent updating. As regards the number of vegetable samples taken for testing of pesticide residues, DFEH said that about 20 000 samples (60% were leafy vegetables and 40% were non-leafy vegetables) of imported vegetables were taken every year for laboratory testing. Of these samples, about 15 000 were taken at the border control points.

35. DS(FEH) said that the Administration had agreed with the Mainland authorities a set of arrangements for supplying vegetables to Hong Kong. As for local production, most of the locally produced vegetables were supplied to the local markets through VMO. There was a small number of backyard farmers in the New Territories who grew vegetables for private consumption or for sale to other villagers. The Administration was exploring the feasibility of introducing a voluntary registration system for local vegetable farmers.

36. Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC) added that about half of the local farms had not yet joined the Accredited Farm Scheme. AFCD would encourage these farms to join the Scheme and adopt good horticulture practice. AFCD would provide technical advice and assistance to farmers who had joined the Scheme, and would conduct regular sample checks on such local produce. DAFC further said that AFCD and C&ED would strengthen efforts to combat smuggling of vegetables from unauthorised sources into Hong Kong.

37. Referring to the Administration's response to the questions raised by the Chairman, Mr Andrew CHENG asked about the details of the regulation applied to vegetables sold in Hong Kong. In his view, the Administration should introduce a mandatory registration system for farmers to ensure that the sources of vegetables could be traced.

38. PS(HWF) explained that all Mainland vegetables supplied to Hong Kong must come from registered farms, which accounted for over 90% of the vegetables sold in Hong Kong markets. For locally produced vegetables (i.e. 4% of vegetables sold in local markets), about half of them were supplied to the local markets through VMO. If vegetables were found to contain pesticide residues exceeding the permitted levels,

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VMO could trace the local farmers concerned. As for the remaining small supply from local farmers, the Administration was exploring ways to obtain their information for establishing a comprehensive tracking system to identify the origins of these vegetables.

39. DFEH added that registered farms that supplied vegetables to Hong Kong were subject to strict regulation of the Mainland authorities. The Mainland authorities would conduct regularly inspection to the registered farms, and vegetables for supply to Hong Kong would be accompanied by documents indicating the types of pesticides used. If excessive pesticides were found in the samples taken for testing, FEHD would inform the Mainland authorities for follow-up action. To his understanding, the farms concerned would not be allowed to supply vegetables to Hong Kong.

40. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that according to the findings of Greenpeace, over 70% of the vegetable samples taken for testing contained pesticide residues, 31% exceeded the permitted levels, and prohibited pesticides were also found in some samples. However, the Administration advised that of the 20 000 samples of imported vegetables taken for testing, only 10 samples failed to comply with the requirements. Dr KWOK asked whether prohibited pesticides were tested by FEHD. Dr KWOK further said that the Greenpeace findings revealed that improvements should be made in the regulatory mechanism for pesticide residues in fresh vegetables and the tracking system of the supermarkets. Dr KWOK considered that the Administration might consider introducing a labelling system requiring the origins of the vegetables to be shown. In addition, AFCD should enhance the promotion of the Accredited Farm Scheme and local produce.

41. AD/FEHD said that FEHD took samples from imported vegetables for testing of residues of permitted and prohibited pesticides. DAFC added that AFCD and VMO were in cooperation to promote local produce from accredited farms in Hong Kong, and a “good farmer” label was issued to those which had adopted good horticultural practice. DS(FEH) pointed out while the origins of vegetables could be traced through the Mainland farms and supermarket chains, there were difficulties in tracing the origins of vegetables in ordinary wet markets. The most effective way to ensure the safety of vegetables was to take samples for testing at points of import.

42. The Chairman asked representatives of the supermarket chains whether the sources of vegetables sold at supermarkets were traceable.

43. Mr JOHNSTON of PARKnSHOP said that the company had adopted a Farm Check system and could track the suppliers for those vegetables sourced from accredited farms in the Mainland. As for other vegetables, the company would check with the agents. He further said that the company was conducting a feasibility study to identify additional types of non-leafy vegetables to be included in its Farm Check system.

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44. Mr BOUND of Wellcome Company said that the company sourced from nominated farms and therefore they could track the supplying farms.

45. Dr Joseph LEE said that there was insufficient evidence that vegetables with pesticide residues exceeding permitted levels were supplied by backyard farmers. He queried why vegetables with excessive pesticide residues were still sold at retail markets, if vegetables sold in local markets were already subject to strict regulation at import, wholesale and retail levels.

46. PS(HWF) clarified that the Administration had not said that those vegetables with excessive pesticide residues were supplied by backyard farmers. The Administration only pointed out that a small amount of local produce was not tested for pesticide residues. PS(HWF) reiterated that the Administration was following up with Greenpeace on their testing standards and methods. PS(HWF) further said that pesticides were widely used in farming except organic farming. In testing for pesticide residues in vegetables, the Administration made reference to the standards of Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), whereas the Greenpeace adopted the European Union standard, which was more stringent.

47. PS(HWF) added that the exporting countries would be responsible for conducting tests on pesticide residues in vegetables. Notwithstanding this, the Administration took samples to test for pesticide residues and other harmful substances at import, wholesale and retail levels. Samples taken at points of entry for quick tests would have the results available when the consignment of vegetables reached the wholesale markets. If the samples were found to have pesticide residues exceeding the permitted levels, the whole consignment would be recalled.

48. Mr Albert CHAN expressed appreciation that Greenpeace had conducted tests on pesticide residues in vegetables sold in local supermarkets to safeguard public health. He said that the presence of excessive pesticide residues and prohibited pesticides in vegetables posed serious threat to public health. As the findings of Greenpeace differed greatly from the test results released by the Administration, he urged the Administration to critically review the existing regulatory mechanism and thoroughly investigate into the incident to ascertain the causes of such discrepancies.

49. PS(HWF) assured members that the Administration would follow up with Greenpeace and the two supermarket chains. She stressed that the Administration followed the international standards in conducting food tests, and vegetables samples were taken at the import, wholesale and retail levels for testing of pesticide residues.

50. DS(FEH) added that VMO also conducted tests for pesticide residues in local vegetables, and the test results were similar to that of the Administration.

51. Referring to the Administration's response to his written questions, the Chairman noted that imported vegetables could be supplied to retail markets

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including supermarkets without routing through the wholesale markets. However, it was reported by the media that FEHD only took samples from those vegetables placed at the rear of the transport vehicles at the border control points. The Chairman expressed concern about such sampling method. The Chairman also asked whether a comprehensive tracking system covering non-leafy vegetables would be adopted by supermarkets.

52. DS(FEH) clarified that FEHD took samples from vegetables placed at various locations of the transport vehicles at the border control points. Samples were also taken at the wholesale and retail levels. DFEH added that 60% of samples were taken from leafy vegetables for testing, and 40% from non-leafy vegetables. In view of the public concern about the presence of excessive pesticide residues in vegetables, the Administration would consider deploying more resources for taking samples at the retail markets to test for pesticide residues.

53. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked whether the management of the two supermarket chains would consider making public the list of farms and agents supplying vegetables to these supermarkets. Mr WONG added that according to media reports, the problematic vegetables were transported to Hong Kong after the FEHD staff stationed at Man Kam To went off duty just before the closure of the control points. Mr WONG asked whether the Administration had taken any remedial actions in this respect.

54. Mr JOHNSTON of PARKnSHOP responded that the list of suppliers and farms might not be useful to consumers. It was more important to improve the tracking system to ensure traceability of fresh produce from farm to store. Mr BOUND of Wellcome Company concurred with Mr JOHNSTON. Mr BOUND added that the company would work with the suppliers to improve the food safety of vegetables.

55. DFEH said that FEHD staff stationed at Man Kam To Control Point worked on two shifts from 6:45 am to 10:30 pm, which tied in with the operation hours of the Control Point, i.e. from 7 am to 10 pm. Following media reports that some FEHD staff went off duty earlier than scheduled, the management had stepped up monitoring of the attendance of staff concerned. Disciplinary actions would be taken against those staff which were found absent from duty.

56. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed dissatisfaction with the response of the two supermarket chains. He considered that the Administration should require the management of supermarkets to make public the lists of farms and suppliers providing vegetables to their stores in order to safeguard consumers' rights to know.

57. Mr JOHNSTON of PARKnSHOP stressed that the company attached much importance to ensure that the food products they sold were safe for consumption. Mr BOUND of Wellcome Company shared a similar view. Mr BOUND added that the

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information on vegetable suppliers and agents could be provided to the government departments. The company considered that it was more important to get the suppliers to improve the food safety standards of their produce.

58. The Chairman said that Mr Daniel LAM had requested to put on record that while Heung Yee Kuk supported the actions taken by the Administration to step up the regulatory mechanism for pesticide residues in vegetables, the Administration should be careful about taking measures to regulate the use of pesticides in vegetables, as it would have impact on backyard farmers.

59. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that the Administration should tighten the monitoring of pesticide residues in vegetables at the border control points, as it would be difficult to trace the problematic vegetables after they were distributed to retail markets.

III Any other business

60. As there was no other business, the meeting ended at 6:05 pm.