

Motion Debate on
“Safeguarding the safety of live and fresh food”
At the Legislative Council Meeting on 23 May 2007
Progress Report

Purpose

The motion passed by the Legislative Council on 23 May 2007 urges the Administration to adopt measures to safeguard the safety of live and fresh food. This paper sets out the follow-up actions taken by the Administration on the motion.

Enacting a set of comprehensive food safety law

2. The drafting process of the food safety law is in progress. It is intended that the details of the new legislation will be put forward for public discussion during the 2007-2008 legislative session.

Implementing the Notification Scheme for Food Importers and Distributors

3. To enhance the safety of imported food, the Administration has announced a package of new measures, one of which is to require food importers and distributors in Hong Kong to notify the Government so that in case of any food incident, the relevant authorities can more readily identify the importer(s) and distributor(s) concerned, trace the source of the problem food and take necessary action.

4. Pending the enactment of the new food safety law, we will encourage food importers and distributors to submit major details of their business to the Centre for Food Safety (CFS). The information will facilitate the work of the CFS in communication and consultation with the food industry, notification of any food concerns or alerts, and contacting the relevant businesses in the event

of a food incident. Through the scheme, the CFS will advise the trade to keep record of the movement of their food as good business practice and to assist in enhancing food traceability.

5. The Administration will introduce a Pre-Statutory Voluntary Notification Scheme (the Scheme) for food importers and distributors, to be implemented in phases, before the enactment of the new law. The objectives are to -

- identify the food importers and distributors so that the CFS can enlist their support and cooperation in the event of a food incident before the new food safety legislation and the mandatory notification scheme come into force;
- enable the trade to familiarise with the future mandatory requirement; and
- enable the CFS to enhance the design and management of the mandatory notification scheme through practical experience.

Implementation timetable of the Scheme:

Time	Food Types
August 2007	Game, meat and poultry carcasses
September 2007	Live food animals/ poultry
October 2007	Milk, milk beverage, cream and frozen confection
November 2007	Vegetables and fruits
December 2007	Fish and fishery products
2008	Other food categories

Strengthening the dissemination of information about the new regulations promulgated by the Mainland Government

6. We will continue to maintain close liaison with the State General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). Upon receiving notification of the new regulations promulgated by the Mainland Government and with its consent, the CFS will make use of the CFS website to disseminate the relevant information to the trade. At present, a link has been put on CFS' website to the list of vegetable farms and collecting & processing establishments, poultry egg farms and poultry egg processing plants, chilled pork processing plants and associated pig farms etc., which are officially approved for supplying food to Hong Kong.

Strengthening liaison with the local trade

7. The CFS has strengthened liaison with the local trade through various channels. The CFS conducts Trade Consultation Forum regularly to provide a platform for the exchange of views on food safety issues with the trade to enhance food safety. Representatives from various food trade associations, food manufacturers, food importers and wholesalers, supermarket operators and retailers are invited to participate in the Forum. Different topics on food safety are discussed at each Forum. The topics on live and fresh food covered include explanation of the *Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations* and regulation of the import and sale of eggs, etc. The CFS also conducts consultative or technical meetings on specific subjects to solicit the views of the trade before amendment of legislation or formulation of guidelines on food safety. The CFS also organises other activities on a regular basis, including food safety talks, Food Safety Day etc., for sharing information with trade members, as well as to raise the awareness of the public and the trade on food safety and promote the importance of tripartite cooperation between the Government, the trade and the community in enhancing food safety. In addition, the CFS produces publications such as *Food Safety Express* and *Food Safety Focus* periodically in order to strengthen communication with the trade.

Studying the Expansion of the Man Kam To Food Control Office

8. In view of the increasing volume of vegetables and fruits imported from the Mainland via the Man Kam To Food Control Office, the CFS is in discussion with the relevant departments on measures to enhance the infrastructural support. Recommendations of the CFS have been submitted to the Architectural Services Department for feasibility studies.

Helping local farms improve their operation mode

9. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) implemented a voluntary Accredited Fish Farm Scheme (AFFS) in mid 2005. Participating fish farms under the scheme are required to adopt a set of aquaculture best practices with a view to raising the environmental hygiene standards of the farms and the quality of cultured fish. Quality assurance tests, including analyses of drug residues and heavy metals in fish, are conducted to ensure that cultured fish meet food safety standards before they are sold at markets. So far, a total of 69 fish farms (20 fish ponds and 49 mariculture farms), representing about 13% of the total area of local fish farms, have registered under the scheme. The first batch of the cultured fish accredited under the scheme, comprising grey mullets, pompano and green groupers, was supplied to local markets in late 2005. Accredited fish are marked with specially designed tags under the AFFS brand name to enable easy recognition by the public. Sales outlets include supermarkets, wet markets and specialty shops for AFFS products. Over 120 000 cabbies of accredited fish have been sold. In conjunction with the Fish Marketing Organisation, the AFCD continues to promote the marketing of fish products under the AFFS brand name.

10. To facilitate the formulation and implementation of appropriate measures for food safety control in future and assist fish farmers in improving fish farm management, cultured fish quality and food safety standards, the AFCD implemented in early 2007 a voluntary registration scheme for local pond fish farm operators as well as a one-year baseline survey on marine fish and pond fish farms throughout the territory to collect information on their modes of operation, species cultured, sources of fry, types of feed and sales

channels. Water and fish samples are also collected from fish farms for tests to evaluate the quality of water used for fish culture and the fish health conditions. The department also introduces Good Aquaculture Practices to fish farmers, providing them with advice on how to prevent and treat fish diseases properly and safely, and encouraging them to participate in the AFFS.

11. In tandem with the development of the society, the local agriculture industry has shifted its focus to high value-added and high quality production with farming practices gradually changing from open field farming to greenhouse cultivation and intensive farming. The output for produce cultivated in a controlled environment will be higher while the use of chemical pesticide will be reduced, leading to safer produce.

12. Farmers are encouraged to build greenhouses and other protective facilities for their crops. The AFCD provides assistance to farmers in designing and constructing rainproof sheds, and over 7,000 sq. m. of these sheds were built last year. To facilitate policy implementation, the department provides one-stop service to farmers in conjunction with the Lands Department in processing applications for Letter of Approval for Agricultural Structures. In the past year, 21 applications for agricultural structures were approved by the Lands Department. The three agricultural loan funds (i.e. the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund, the J.E. Joseph Trust Fund and the Vegetable Marketing Organization Loan Fund) administered by the department provide a total of \$28 million (as at May 2007) for loans. Applications will be considered according to the actual needs of the farmers in business development.

13. To help farmers adapt to modern production practices, enhance productivity and focus on product safety, technical workshops and field demonstrations are organized by the AFCD from time to time to introduce new varieties (e.g. rock melon and seedless watermelon) and new cultivation techniques. 18 technical workshops were held last year with a total attendance of over 800. Workshops on marketing skills and strategies are also organized to upgrade the skills of farmers in marketing their produce. Assistance is also provided by the department to agricultural bodies and farmers in arranging overseas study visits, which will enable the participants to have a broader international view as well as a better understanding of the agriculture sector of other countries. Last year, local farmers visited Korea to

meet their counterparts for experience sharing and exchange.

14. Safe products come from quality-based production process and management. Since its launch in 1994, the Accredited Farm Scheme has earned a good reputation in the local market. To further strengthen communication with farmers and promote effective transfer of safe production techniques, the AFCD launched the Local Vegetable Farms Voluntary Registration Scheme in 2006. Up to June 2007, a total of 1,801 vegetable farmers have already registered under the scheme. The department will provide technical assistance and agricultural services to registered farmers to enhance their awareness of safe production, farming techniques and product quality with a view to achieving better quality and higher competitiveness for their produce.

Promotion of organic farming and increased provision of technical support

15. Organic farming is a production method in line with the principle of nature conservation and environmental protection. In the process of organic farming, farmers refrain from using synthetic fertilizers or chemical pesticides so that production will not be made at the expense of the environment and future generations.

16. Since December 2000, the AFCD has been providing active support to farmers in the development of organic farming. This includes providing technical support to local organic farms and assisting farmers in overcoming technical problems concerning pest and disease control, horticultural skills, soil management, seed saving, etc. Up until late June 2007, a total of 94 vegetable farms have participated in the “Organic Farming Support Service” provided by the department, representing an increase of 68% over the same period last year. The total area of agricultural land dedicated to organic farming has reached 38 hectares with the average production volume amounting to 3.5 tonnes per day.

17. The AFCD has also introduced new varieties of vegetables to local farms in a bid to improve the quality of local organic vegetables as a whole. Quality vegetables that have been introduced to farmers in recent years include organic strawberry, organic edible chrysanthemum, organic watermelon and

rock melon, which have been well received by the market.

18. The department is also helping farmers to develop organic market through the Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO). At present there are more than 30 retail outlets selling organic vegetables distributed via the VMO and they include large supermarkets, MTR shops, health food stores and an outlet at the Lions Nature Education Centre in Tsiu Hang, Sai Kung. In addition, the department has been actively working with other organizations towards diversifying marketing channels, an example of which is to help the Federation of Vegetable Marketing Co-operative Societies Ltd set up weekend farmer markets.

19. With the financial support from the VMO, the non-profit-making Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre has formulated a set of standards applicable to local organic farm produce. The centre also provides certification service and promotes its organic seals to protect consumers. Since the certification service was launched in late 2004, a total of 25 organic farms have been awarded certification.

Food and Health Bureau
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