

For information

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Development of Local Agriculture and Fisheries Industries

PURPOSE

At the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on 17 October 2008, a Member requested the Administration to provide a note setting out the various measures taken by the Administration to promote development of the local agriculture and fisheries industries. This paper provides the relevant information for the Panel's reference.

OVERALL STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES INDUSTRIES

2. The Administration has all along been promoting the sustainable development of the local agriculture and fisheries industries through the following five-pronged strategy -

- (i) assisting the local agriculture and fisheries industries to move towards sustainable development;
- (ii) communicating and cooperating with the Mainland and foreign governments;
- (iii) supporting the industries in technical upgrading and professional training;
- (iv) assisting the industries in developing quality brand names; and
- (v) providing financial assistance and emergency relief to the industries.

Various measures are explained in details in the following paragraphs.

(i) *Assisting the local agriculture and fisheries industries to move towards sustainable development*

3. In December 2006, the Government established the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries to advise on the direction and long term goals for sustainable development of local fisheries industry. The

Committee is comprised of representatives from the fisheries industry, academics and experts from various fields, government officials and Legislative Council members for making comprehensive and balanced recommendations on the fisheries policy for Hong Kong. The Committee has drafted plans and measures on the future development of sustainable fisheries and has earlier consulted relevant stakeholders, including fishermen groups, green groups, committees relating to fisheries in Hong Kong and bodies that have expressed views to the Committee, on these preliminary proposals. The Committee will complete a report in early 2009 and will submit the report to the Government for consideration.

4. For poultry and livestock farming, expectations of the public on public health and environmental hygiene are on the rise. A number of poultry and pig farmers have therefore decided to join the relevant voluntary surrender schemes (VSSs). There are currently 34 poultry farms and 43 pig farms left after the VSSs. For those farmers who decide to continue operation, we will develop code of practice for them, with a view to enhancing their rearing standard and promoting sustainable development. The Code of Practice for chicken farming was implemented in February 2003. In response to the avian flu incident in December 2008, we have set up two investigation groups responsible for conducting an epidemiology study on the avian flu outbreak on the index farm and for conducting a vaccine study respectively. The groups will review and revise the guidelines on biosecurity measures of farms with a view to assisting farmers in better protecting the safety of their chickens, and assist the Administration in the choice of vaccine most suitable for Hong Kong's circumstances. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) is also planning to introduce a Code of Practice for pig farming for licensed local pig farms to enhance their management and hygiene standards and is liaising closely with the pig farming industry in this respect.

5. For promoting organic farming, AFCD has since 2000 been actively providing assistance to local agricultural sector in developing organic farming through the provision of technical support to local organic farms on pest and disease control, horticultural practices, soil management and seed saving. AFCD has also been assisting the trade through the Vegetable Marketing Organisation (VMO) to develop the organic food market. There are now more than 30 organic vegetable retail outlets under the VMO marketing network, including large supermarkets, MTR shops, health food stores and the Lions Nature Education Centre outlet at Tsiu Hang, Sai Kung.

(ii) *Communicating and cooperating with the Mainland and foreign governments*

6. The Government has all along been in close dialogue with the Mainland and foreign governments, ensuring the industries understand the impact of the agriculture and fisheries policies of the nearby regions on Hong Kong. AFCD has also been exploring other possible initiatives to strengthen agriculture and fisheries cooperation and facilitate the trade. For example, in response to the requests from pig farmers, we have discussed with the Mainland Government to allow Hong Kong pig farmers to invest in pig farms in Mainland for export to Hong Kong on the conditions that these farms meet the relevant food safety, bio-security and environmental requirements in Mainland. There are now seven pig farms in Mainland that are operated by Hong Kong pig farmers. Besides, AFCD has been liaising with Mainland and foreign fisheries authorities and agencies to obtain information on sustainable fisheries and related operations such as aquaculture, recreational fishing, offshore fishing and fish processing for dissemination to fishermen and fish farmers.

(iii) *Assisting the industries in developing quality brand names*

7. AFCD has implemented the Accredited Farm Scheme and the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme to encourage good husbandry practices with a view to helping the public to identify quality and safe agricultural and fishery products and enhancing consumer confidence in the quality of the products. Since their implementation, both schemes have received support from the agriculture and fisheries industries and the general public. Currently a total of 211 vegetable farms and 78 fish farms have participated in the two voluntary schemes. In addition, AFCD has been actively working with various organisations towards diversifying marketing channels, an example of which is to help the Federation of Vegetable Marketing Co-operative Societies Ltd set up weekend farmers' markets. Besides, AFCD has been assisting the trade in organising large-scale promotional activities, such as the annual Farmfest, with a view to enabling the public to have a better understanding of the local organic and quality agricultural and fisheries products and to establish contacts with local farmers, fish farmers and fishermen so that they may continue to buy these products from them in future. AFCD, the Fish Marketing Organization (FMO) and the VMO will continue to organise publicity and marketing activities for quality local agricultural and fisheries products to help the industries develop quality brand names.

(iv) ***Supporting the industries in technical upgrading and professional training***

8. To provide training for professionals in the local agriculture and fisheries industries, AFCD introduces new techniques to farmers and fish farmers through regular technical talks and on-farm demonstrations, as well as distribution of advisory leaflets. Overseas study tours are also arranged for farmers and fishermen from time to time to enhance their knowledge in the development of the agriculture and fisheries industries in other places of the world. Moreover, fishermen and fish farmers may apply for financial assistance from the Marine Fish Scholarship Fund for attending relevant training courses.

9. AFCD is committed to assisting local fish farmers in upgrading and developing fish fry hatching and breeding techniques through the provision of technical support, training and trial schemes in collaboration with fish farmers. To step up efforts in this area, AFCD has set up experimental hatchery facilities at Ta Kwu Ling in mid-2008 to facilitate research in fish fry hatching and breeding techniques. In September 2008, it organised a training course on grouper fry hatching jointly with the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific at Ta Kwu Ling to provide the necessary knowledge and techniques to local fish farmers, fishermen and people interested in the research and development of fish fry hatching and breeding, so as to further promote the development of fish fry hatching and breeding in Hong Kong.

10. AFCD also continues to organise various technical talks and on-farm demonstrations for farmers and fish farmers to introduce improved species of agriculture and fisheries products and new techniques. In 2008, AFCD introduced to the local farming industry four new and improved varieties of vegetable and fruit including little cucumber, leafy beet, dark leaf Chinese white cabbage and little sweet melon. For fisheries industry, following the introduction of jade perch for local culture, the department has successfully produced jade perch fry from hatching of imported fertilized eggs and induced spawning with a view to helping fish farmers secure a stable supply of fish fry at lower costs. A training workshop was conducted in June 2008 to pass on the techniques to fish farmers.

(v) ***Providing financial assistance and emergency relief to the industries***

11. The Government has set up the Agricultural Development Fund (ADF) under the VMO to support local agriculture. In 2007-08, ADF allocated HK\$21 million for various projects promoting agricultural research and development, such as promoting organic farming, providing financial grants to the Hong Kong Organic Resources Centre for its operation, improving the market facilities of VMO and organising the Farmfest for the promotion of local agricultural products. In addition, The VMO Loan Fund, Kadoorie Agriculture Aid Loan Fund and J.E. Joseph Trust Fund also provide low interest loans to farmers.

12. For fisheries industry, AFCD provides low interest loans to fishermen and fish farmers to help them develop or switch to sustainable operations and to meet operational needs from various fisheries loan funds, including the Fisheries Development Loan Fund and FMO Loan Fund.

13. In addition, the Government has also put in place the mechanism and procedures for providing emergency relief to farmers, fish farmers and fishermen affected by natural disasters. Emergency relief will be provided on the principle of equity to help them resume operations as early as possible.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
January 2009**