

Information Paper

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Control on Vegetables Imported from the Mainland

Background

This paper briefs Members on the measures taken by the Administration on the control of vegetables imported from the Mainland.

Existing Control Measures

2. In 2007 and 2008 (January – June), over 600 000 tonnes and 300 000 tonnes of vegetables were imported into Hong Kong respectively and about 93% of them came from the Mainland.

3. The Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132) provides that all food on sale in Hong Kong must be fit for human consumption. Vegetables are not high-risk foods. According to the information from the Department of Health, from January 2007 to October 2008, there was no case of food poisoning due to pesticides.

Administrative Arrangements with the Mainland Authorities

4. The Government has set up administrative arrangements with the Mainland authorities to monitor vegetables imported from the Mainland. Since 1 July 2002, vegetables supplied to Hong Kong must come from registered farms or registered collection stations in accordance with the requirements set out in the 《供港澳蔬菜檢驗檢疫管理辦法》 (Administrative Measures on the Quarantine of the Vegetables Supplied to Hong Kong and Macao). Each consignment must also be accompanied with 「供港澳蔬菜檢驗檢疫監管卡」 (inspection card of vegetables supplied to Hong Kong and Macao) and 「供港澳蔬菜農藥使用報告單」 (certificate of pesticide usage for vegetables supplied to Hong Kong and Macao) or 「供港澳新鮮蔬菜出貨清單」 (export certificate of fresh vegetables supplied to Hong Kong and Macao) and affixed with label with information on the source of the vegetables on the packaging (e.g. basket and carton).

5. The list of registered vegetable farms and registered collection stations has been uploaded onto the official website of the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) and will be updated from time to time. A hyperlink to the relevant webpage has been created in the website of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for the trade's reference.

6. The Mainland has further stepped up control measures on vegetables supplied to Hong Kong in April 2007. These include the management of vegetable farms and collection stations which supply vegetables to Hong Kong, labelling requirements, supervision of the whole loading process, marking of vegetable consignments and sealing of the vegetable vehicles.

7. The CFS has been monitoring and facilitating the import of vegetables in accordance with the administrative arrangements. The Government has maintained close liaison with the Mainland in respect of management at source and conducted sampling inspections at import, wholesale and retail levels to ensure food safety.

Inspection of Vegetable Vehicles and Food Sampling

8. At present, some 200 vegetable vehicles enter Hong Kong via Man Kam To (MKT) per day from the Mainland. Our officers will inspect each vehicle when it arrives at the Man Kam To Food Control Office (MKTFCO). They will check whether the seal on the vehicle remains intact and whether the consignment tallies with the accompanying documents, inspect the vegetables and take samples for quick tests for pesticide residues and comprehensive chemical analysis. In 2007 and 2008 (January – October), about 28 000 and 24 000 vegetable vehicles were inspected at MKT respectively and there was no report of cases involving vegetable sources not tallying with the accompanying documents. During the same period, over 25 500 vegetable samples were taken at MKT for testing including tests for pesticide residues. Five of them were found unsatisfactory and about 10 000 kg of vegetables were destroyed.

9. The CFS will take follow-up actions against samples with unsatisfactory results, which include the tracing of the source of the vegetables concerned, putting on record the information of the relevant

farms and informing the respective Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau for follow-up actions. For future vegetable consignments from the relevant farms, they will be detained for testing and will be released only when satisfactory results are obtained. Also, the CFS has enhanced collaboration with the Customs and Excise Department to frequently conduct joint inspections on vegetable vehicles at MKT to prevent the entry of problem vegetables into Hong Kong and combat smuggling of food.

10. Apart from the testing of vegetables at import level, the CFS also takes vegetable samples at wholesale and retail levels under the routine food surveillance programme. From January 2007 to October 2008, more than 12 600 vegetable samples were tested, including tests for pesticide residues, and 19 of them were found unsatisfactory. The CFS took follow-up actions by destroying the problem vegetables, tracing the source and informing the relevant authorities of the place of origin for appropriate follow-up actions.

Communication with Stakeholders

11. The CFS has been maintaining close liaison with the vegetable traders to discuss the monitoring of the safety of food imported from the Mainland. A meeting with the vegetable traders was held in early October to discuss suggestions on control of vegetables imported from the Mainland.

12. We have also maintained close contact with the Mainland to follow up on the management of problem vegetables at source and to discuss ways to further enhance safety of vegetables.

13. It must, however, be stressed that whether imported vegetables should be distributed through wholesalers is solely a business decision and has no relation with food safety control. If traders note the import of problem vegetables into Hong Kong, they may report to the CFS, who will then follow up on the matter with the relevant enforcement authorities. ◦

The Way Forward

14. MKTFCO was built in 1996 and its geographical environment is not suitable for inspection of modern large vegetable vehicles. In order

to prepare for the enhanced inspection of imported food, we are now planning the extension of the facilities at MKTFCO.

15. Furthermore, we will introduce the Food Safety Bill to strengthen food safety control. The Bill will include a mandatory registration scheme for food importers and distributors and will require food traders to maintain proper transaction records to enhance food traceability. The Government has also introduced the Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Bill 2008 into the Legislative Council for first and second reading on 5 November 2008. The Bill proposes to empower the authorities to make an order to prohibit the import or supply of problem food and order a food recall where the situation warrants for the protection of public health.

Food and Health Bureau

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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