



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

本函檔號：

電話號碼：(852) 2973 8195

來函檔號：

傳真號碼：(852) 2136 3281

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Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Miss Mary SO)
(Fax: 2509 0775)

Dear Miss So,

**Meeting of the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
on 10 November 2009**

At the above meeting, the Panel discussed the inspection and quarantine arrangements for vegetables imported from the Mainland and the Administration's proposal on the extension of Man Kam To Food Control Office. Our reply on these issues is set out below.

Inspection and quarantine arrangements for vegetables imported from the Mainland

As some members of the vegetable trade alleged that vegetables which came from improper sources under the guise of a proper label were once again found to be imported to Hong Kong through the Nanshan Centre for Processing and Distribution of Agricultural Products to Hong Kong, and that smuggled goods or food items were also involved, we have reflected the concerns of the trade to the relevant Mainland authorities. The Mainland authorities have looked into the case and released their preliminary investigation results recently.

The Customs and Excise Department ("C&ED") has also launched an investigation into the allegations, and meetings have been convened under the Task Force against Smuggling of Food and Animals to follow up on the matter. The Task Force, an inter-departmental group to combat such smuggling activities, comprises officers from the C&ED, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. On 27 October, the C&ED obtained from Legislative Councillor the Hon WONG Sing-chi and North District Council Member Mr LAW Sai-yan a compact disc alleged to have recorded the course of the smuggling activities. Since the quality of the compact disc was not satisfactory, the C&ED has promptly contacted Mr LAW for more concrete information to facilitate the investigation. In this respect, we will hold a meeting with the Hon WONG Sing-chi, Mr LAW Sai-yan and members of the vegetable trade in mid December. Besides, we have provided a copy of the compact disc and the relevant information to the Mainland authorities for follow-up investigation.

On the safety of vegetables imported from the Mainland, the Hong Kong Government and the Mainland authorities have set up an administrative arrangement, under which stringent requirements are imposed on various aspects in the safety management system of vegetables. From strengthening control and management at source to regularising supervision in vegetable farms and production and processing establishments, and through risk management and tests on pesticide residues, we have sought to ensure the quality and safety of vegetables supplied to Hong Kong. Moreover, the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine implemented the new "Administrative Measures on Inspection, Quarantine and Supervision for Vegetables Supplied to Hong Kong and Macao" on 1 November this year to further strengthen management and control at source in respect of the vegetable farms and production and processing establishments, and improve the source tracing system of vegetables. We have submitted to the Panel a paper to explain the details of the requirements of the new administrative measures.

Apart from enhanced inspection and quarantine of vegetables by the Mainland authorities, the Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") also attaches great importance to sample testing of imported vegetables to ensure compliance with the safety standards. Each year, the CFS conducts random inspections of over 28 000 vehicles transporting vegetables imported from the Mainland, and have stepped up the inspection measures in the past year. Between 2007 and November this year, over 36 000 vegetables samples were taken and tested for pesticide residues at the Man Kam To Control

Point by the CFS and the passing rate was 99.9%. According to information from the Department of Health, no cases of food poisoning caused by pesticide residues were reported in the last couple of years. Such objective data show that there has been no food safety problem associated with vegetables supplied by the Mainland to Hong Kong.

As for trade members' claim that there has been an upward surge of 20 to 30% of vegetables smuggled into Hong Kong in recent years, the Hong Kong Merchandise Trade Statistics show that in the past few years, the volume of vegetables imported from the Mainland remained stable. The official import figures should have reflected a decreasing trend if large quantities of vegetables coming from non-registered farms in the Mainland are imported but the relevant figures indicate that this has not been the case.

Regarding the allegation that "direct-selling vegetables" have seriously affected the operation of the five Government wholesale markets, we note that on arrival in Hong Kong, "direct-selling vegetables" are not required to route through the wholesale markets for distribution. However, this does not mean that such imported vegetables are "smuggled vegetables". Under the free market policy, the distribution mode of imported vegetables, e.g., through the wholesalers or direct selling, should be determined by market demand. It is inappropriate for the Government to intervene. In fact, whether distributed through wholesalers or direct selling, vegetables imported from the Mainland would undergo inspection and quarantine by the Mainland authorities as well as random inspection by the CFS. As such, the distribution arrangements for imported vegetables are not related to food safety at all.

As for the Chairman's proposal that Panel members should pay a visit to Shenzhen to learn about the arrangements for the import of vegetables into Hong Kong, we understand that the Legislative Council Secretariat has been responsible for making arrangements and providing the necessary support for visits by delegations of LegCo members outside Hong Kong (including the Mainland). We may offer advice and assistance as appropriate with regard to the drawing up of the program of the visits.

Extension of Man Kam To Food Control Office

A Member suggested that the CFS should install a mobile X-ray vehicle scanning system ("MXRVSS") to facilitate its inspection and testing work.

The MXRVSS currently installed at Man Kam To by the C&ED produces X-ray images of containerised cargoes to facilitate identification of suspicious container structures and cargoes. As far as ensuring the safety of imported food is concerned, the most effective approach is for the CFS to check the relevant documents at the import level and take food samples for chemical or microbiological testing. Therefore, we do not consider it necessary to install an additional MXRVSS at Man Kam To Food Control Office at this stage.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Gillian LAM)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.:

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
(Attn : Mr Amor Wong Fax: 2530 1368)

Customs and Excise Department
(Attn: Mr Ben Leung Fax : 2676 2424)