

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 2 April 2015**

Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
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Chairman and Honourable Members,

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) is committed to ensuring food safety and environmental hygiene with a view to promoting public health and improving people's quality of life.

2. In the 2015-16 Estimates, about \$6.5 billion has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene", representing an increase of about \$150 million (2.3%) over the previous year and accounting for 2% of recurrent government expenditure.

3. New resources available in this financial year are mainly used to provide –

- one-off allocation of about \$39 million for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to cope with the rise in outsourcing contract price;
- additional funding of about \$12 million for FEHD to strengthen enforcement action and regulatory measures against illegal shop front extensions under the Enhancement of District Administration Scheme;
- one-off allocation of about \$4 million for FEHD to enhance pest control service in response to cases of dengue fever; and

- additional funding of about \$3 million for FHB to provide secretariat support and legal advisory service for the Fishermen Claims Appeal Board.

4. I will now proceed to outline the policy priorities and work progress.

New Agricultural Policy

5. The Government published a public consultation document in late 2014, inviting public views on a new agricultural policy. Supportive measures proposed in the document include exploring the feasibility of establishing an Agricultural Park, and considering the establishment of a Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund.

6. Over the past three months, extensive consultation with various sectors was conducted. The community in general supported the new agricultural policy and believed the sustainable development of local agriculture will contribute to both the protection of food safety and the better up-keeping of the rural environment. As regards the supportive measures underpinning the new policy, stakeholders had also put forward a good deal of valuable views. The consultation period ended on 31 March. The Government will carefully consolidate the views received and draw up a detailed proposal and an implementation timetable.

Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza (AI)

7. Since the occurrence of H7N9 AI cases in the Mainland, Hong Kong has been on high alert and taking measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Since April 2013, we had, one after the other, introduced the H7 AI Polymerase Chain Reaction test and then the serological test.

8. Last year, Hong Kong detected H7 AI virus in imported live poultry in January and December. The two cases demonstrate that the existing testing

system has achieved what it is designed to do, namely reducing the risk of infected birds entering our retail markets. We will update our risk assessment from time to time, maintain liaison with the relevant inspection and quarantine authorities, and strengthen the preventive and surveillance measures when necessary.

9. Contact with infected live poultry is the main source of risk insofar as human infection by AI is concerned. Although the system for surveillance and control of AI we have built up over the years with strenuous endeavours is by and large effective in reducing AI risks in Hong Kong, no surveillance system can attain zero risk. That being the case, the Government is commissioning a consultant to study the future of the live poultry trade including the question of whether the sale of live poultry should continue in Hong Kong. We hope to complete the consultancy study and seek public views on the consultant's recommendations within 2015.

Food Safety

10. The Government has always attached great importance to ensuring food safety. In the coming year, the Government will continue to enhance food safety in Hong Kong through a multi-pronged approach.

11. With regard to updating the legislation, a public consultation on regulation of nutrition and health claims on formula products and prepackaged foods for infants and young children under the age of 36 months was launched in January. The consultation period will end in mid-April. After completing the collation of views collected during the consultation period, we aim to put forward the details of the relevant legislative proposals in 2015.

12. As a result of the Taiwan substandard lard incident last September, the public expressed deep concern about the safety of edible oil. To address the public concern, FHB and the Environment Bureau (ENB) have decided to step up regulation of the safety of edible oil and the recycling of waste cooking oil in Hong

Kong. The Government will seek to consult the public on the proposals in the first half of 2015. As regards the regulation of cooked meat, we are currently reviewing the relevant legislation and will consult the public on this issue.

13. This year, the Government also proposes to expand the Food Safety Laboratory in Pok Fu Lam for enhancing effective delivery of testing work to protect food safety. We will arrange district consultation on the proposal.

Promoting a Healthy Diet

14. Consuming food with high salt and sugar content may cause harm to human health in the long term. In view of this, FHB's target in promoting a healthy diet in 2015 is to gradually reduce the intake of salt and sugar by Hong Kong citizens to the levels recommended by the World Health Organization. FHB has established in mid-March the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food. The Committee is responsible for devising relevant strategies, with members comprising representatives from different sectors. We have also set up an International Advisory Panel on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, the members of which comprise experts from the Mainland and overseas. They will share with us successful international experiences in promoting the reduction of salt and sugar in food.

Public Markets and Hawkers

15. The policy on public markets and hawkers as well as their operating environment are subjects of concern to many members. The Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene has established a Subcommittee on each of these two subjects respectively.

16. For the purpose of developing proposals to improve the operating environment of public markets, the Government has commissioned a consultancy study. We have earlier briefed the relevant Subcommittee on the major findings

of the consultancy study. We are studying the consultant's recommendations in detail and plan to put forward concrete improvement proposals in 2015 for a number of public markets, after taking into account the conditions of the markets and the challenges and opportunities facing them.

17. As for hawkers, the relevant Subcommittee has suggested that the Government should formulate its hawker policy from a "development" rather than a "management and control" perspective. Early this year, we shared the Government's current thinking with the Subcommittee. Besides, I have just briefed the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the 18 District Councils on some important principles and proposed measures for further developing our hawker policy. FHB is committed to formulating a hawker policy which can strike an optimal balance among the different views of various stakeholders, i.e. allowing licensed hawking business to thrive on the one hand, whilst avoiding unreasonable nuisance to the local community in addition to ensuring food safety, environmental hygiene and public security on the other hand. We will look at any specific proposals for developing the hawker trade with an open mind.

18. In the coming year, we will actively support the work of the two Subcommittees and jointly explore practical measures to improve the operating environment of public markets and hawkers.

19. We are deeply saddened by the loss of an FEHD hawker control officer, Mr. WU Kong-sum, who was injured whilst on duty and passed away last month. As far as frontline enforcement work is concerned, FEHD has provided guidelines and training to its staff. However, the difficulties that may be encountered by frontline staff whilst on duty are not fully predictable. In order to ensure the personal safety of frontline law enforcement officers whilst on duty, we are now reviewing the relevant arrangements and looking for ways to make improvements.

Columbarium Policy

20. In promoting green burial, the Government will continue to foster the necessary change in mindset, by encouraging the public to use more environmentally friendly and sustainable means of disposal of human ashes, including scattering human ashes in Gardens of Remembrance or at sea.

21. As for the district-based columbarium development scheme, we have obtained the support of relevant District Councils for the development of columbarium on seven potential sites identified, involving over 450 000 new niches. Among them, the target completion dates of 160 000 niches at Tsang Tsui and 20 000 niches at Tsing Tsuen Road will be 2018 and 2019 the earliest respectively. This year, we will continue to take forward our work in this respect, and hope other development sites will get the support of the local community.

22. On regulating private columbaria, we introduced the Private Columbaria Bill (the Bill) to the LegCo in June last year, proposing to establish a licensing scheme. We will continue to work closely with the Bills Committee for early implementation of the licensing scheme. Before the passage of the Bill, the Government is committed to stepping up public education to advise members of the public to exercise care when purchasing niches from private columbaria, and consider renting a niche on a short-term basis, rather than making any rash purchase decision before the proposed legislation comes into operation.

Animal Welfare

23. The Government attaches great importance to animal welfare and management. To better regulate pet trading, we are drafting the legislative amendments for tabling before the LegCo this year. Besides, the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) trial programme was launched in Yuen Long and Cheung Chau in January this year. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Department will follow up with the relevant animal welfare organizations and assess the effectiveness of the programme.

24. We will continue to step up our efforts in publicity and education. We will also reinforce stray animal management through a number of new and enhanced measures.

25. Chairman, my colleagues and I are happy to answer questions from Members.