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Replies to supplementary questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Food and Health

Session No. : 16

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)01

(Question Serial No. S0088)

Head: (139) Government Secretariat: Food and Health Bureau
(Food Branch)

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (3) Environmental Hygiene

Controlling Officer: Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food) (Mrs Cherry TSE)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

1. According to Reply Serial No. FHB022, the average waiting time for niches in public columbaria increased from 43.5 months in 2012 to 45 months in 2013, and even to 54 months in 2014, which means that the waiting time was 4.5 years, longer than the average waiting time of 3.2 years for public housing units. Has the Government any concrete measures to shorten the average waiting time for niches in public columbaria? If so, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons? Has the Government conducted any assessment on whether the future supply of niches in public columbaria meets the public demand? If not, will the Government increase the supply of niches in public columbaria in addition to the existing projects, and accelerate the completion of the existing new columbarium projects?
2. The Government plans to increase the fees for cremation of human and skeletal remains in the next 3 years, from the current \$90 to \$1,220 to next year's \$3,120, and even to \$6,560 in 2017-18. Will the Government set aside the decision on fee increase or reduce the fee increase rate of the above service? If so, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons?

Asked by: Hon WONG Kwok-hing

Reply:

The information sought is provided as follows –

1. On the allocation of new niches, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department) offered 3 374 new niches at the Kwai Chung Columbarium and 18 501 new niches at the Diamond Hill Columbarium for balloting in February and June 2009 respectively. All applicants were eventually invited to select a new niche by the end of 2009. In other words, there was no unsuccessful application for new

niches by the time when the two subject allocation exercises were completed. Subsequently, the Department offered another 43 710 new niches at the Wo Hop Shek Kiu Tau Road Columbarium (Phase V) and 1 540 new niches at the Diamond Hill Columbarium in three phases by balloting since September 2012. Based on the present situation, we expect that the majority of the applicants for new niches would be invited to select a new niche by the end of the phased allocation exercise by August 2015.

As regards the re-allocation of niches in public columbaria, the average waiting time depends on the number of niches returned to the Department. In the past three years (2012 to 2014), about 230 niches were returned to the Department per annum on average. To shorten the average waiting time for re-allocated niches, the applicants in the waiting list for re-allocated niches were invited in writing to join the balloting exercises for new niches at the Kwai Chung Columbarium and the Diamond Hill Columbarium in 2009 as well as the balloting exercises for new niches at the Wo Hop Shek Kiu Tau Road Columbarium (Phase V) from 2012 to 2015.

The Government has been actively increasing the supply of public niches through the district-based columbarium development scheme, under which a total of 24 potential sites have been identified in all 18 districts across the territory for columbarium development. We have obtained the in-principle support of relevant District Councils for the development of columbarium on seven such potential sites, involving over 450 000 new niches. Among them, the construction of 1 540 new niches in the Diamond Hill Columbarium and 1 000 niches in Cheung Chau Cemetery were completed in 2012 and 2013 respectively. In the years to come, 160 000 niches at Tsang Tsui and 20 000 niches at Tsing Tsuen Road are scheduled respectively for completion by 2018 and 2019 at the earliest. We would continue to work on other public columbarium projects in the pipeline in consultation with the relevant DCs. Taking into account the new supply provided by the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries, the supply of new niches will be progressively increased to meet the needs of the community. Meanwhile, we would step up publicity to encourage better utilisation of existing public niches following relaxation of the cap on the number of sets of human ashes that may be interred therein. We would also make sustained efforts to promote, through public education, the wider use of green burial.

2. The proposal to increase the fees for cremation of human and skeletal remains was discussed at the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) on 10 February 2015. The Department is reviewing the fee revision proposal in the light of Panel Members' comments.¹

- End -

¹ A question raised earlier by Hon. WONG Kwok-hing (namely question R095 originally numbered as Q0258) seeks the same information. It has been ruled out. The above reply will serve to respond to the ruled-out question as well.

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
ORAL QUESTION**

(Question Serial No. SV022)

Head: (22) Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Agriculture, Fisheries and Fresh Food Wholesale Markets

Controlling Officer: Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Alan WONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

The Administration is requested to provide information on the number of reports received by the Police on illegal fishing activities.

Asked by: Hon HO Chun-yin, Steven

Reply:

The number of reports received by the Police on illegal fishing activities in 2013 and 2014 is 49 and 59 respectively.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)03

(Question Serial No. S0124)

Head: (22) Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (3) Animal, Plant and Fisheries Regulation and Technical Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Alan WONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

The Government will develop public rental housing on the site of the Sung Wong Toi Animal Management Centre. Where will the Centre be relocated?

Asked by: Hon MO Claudia

Reply:

In connection with the Public Housing Construction Programme of the Government, there is a plan to relocate the Animal Management Centre (AMC) of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) located at Sung Wong Toi Road, Kowloon. AFCD is in the course of working with the Planning Department to identify a suitable site for relocating the AMC.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)04

(Question Serial No. S0126)

Head: (22) Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (3) Animal, Plant and Fisheries Regulation and Technical Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Alan WONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

According to the figures provided by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the number of animals euthanised is on a steady decline year by year. Does the AFCD share the courage and vision as that of Taipei City to implement a "zero euthanasia" policy? In addition, is there any specific timetable for ceasing to euthanise healthy community animals eventually?

Asked by: Hon MO Claudia

Reply:

Under the existing arrangement, stray animals caught by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will usually be kept at the Animal Management Centres (AMCs) for at least four days pending retrieval by their owners. Unclaimed animals will be passed to animal welfare organisations (AWOs) for rehoming if they are found to be healthy and of an acceptable temperament. However, there might be animals that are assessed to be unsuitable for rehoming due to health or temperamental reasons, or cannot be rehomed by AWOs. Continuous keeping of these animals in captivity would not be in their best interest from the animal welfare point of view. In addition, as new stray animals will come in everyday, it would not be practically feasible to keep all such animals for long in AMCs with finite capacities. As such, we consider it necessary to continue with euthanasia of animals which are unsuitable for rehoming or unable to be rehomed. AFCD will continue to strengthen its efforts on various fronts, such as the promotion of responsible pet ownership and animal rehoming as well as taking enforcement action against abandonment of animals by irresponsible owners, with a view to reducing the number of stray animals that need to be euthanised.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)05

(Question Serial No. S0129)

Head: (22) Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (3) Animal, Plant and Fisheries Regulation and Technical Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Alan WONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

This is a follow-up question on Reply Serial No. FHB(FE)072:

Regarding the reply to (a), in respect of the inspection of the 72 local farms, 4 472 and 4 331 inspections were carried out in 2013 and 2014 respectively, i.e. over 60 inspections per day. Please explain why over 4 000 inspections have been conducted where there are only 72 farms in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, what are the actual, revised and estimated expenditures for carrying out such inspections in 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16?

Asked by: Hon WONG Pik-wan, Helena

Reply:

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department conducted over 4 000 inspections to 72 local livestock farms in 2013 and 2014 respectively, with an average of around 60 inspections per farm per year. Such frequent inspections are required to (a) check their compliance with licensing conditions on the biosecurity requirements, use of farm premises and livestock waste treatment system, etc.; (b) closely monitor the farm hygiene and animal health conditions; and (c) collect samples for testing to ensure that all food animals are fit for human consumption prior to leaving the farm gate.

The actual expenditure in 2013-14 and the revised estimate in 2014-15 for conducting inspection of local livestock farms are \$36 million and \$38 million respectively. The provision earmarked for this area of work in 2015-16 is \$38 million.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)06

(Question Serial No. S0083)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

As set out in the reply under serial number FHB159, the number of food samples detected with unsatisfactory radiation level in 2013 and 2014 were 57 and 139 respectively. Please advise on the reason(s) for the substantial increase in the number of food samples detected with unsatisfactory radiation level. Meanwhile, with regard to recent media reports on the import of carrots by a local trader from the Chiba prefecture, i.e. one of the areas affected by the nuclear disaster, please advise whether the Department will step up the sampling of Japanese food; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s). Please also advise whether the Department will review the existing criteria for the import of food products from the areas affected by the nuclear disaster; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon MAK Mei-kuen, Alice

Reply:

The 57 and 139 unsatisfactory food samples found in 2013 and 2014 respectively were taken under the Centre for Food Safety's (CFS) routine food surveillance programme. None of these samples involved products with unsatisfactory radiation level. In addition to the samples taken under the food surveillance programme, another 56 382 and 61 459 samples were taken by CFS in 2013 and 2014 respectively from imported Japanese food for examination of radiation level. No unsatisfactory radiation level was detected on imported Japanese food in 2013 and 2014.

CFS will continue to adopt a risk-based approach in formulating strategies to monitor food imports from Japan, and will adjust the surveillance measures on Japanese food imports as necessary to ensure food safety and protect public health. In doing so, CFS will make reference to the test results of the Japanese authority and local surveillance, latest measures taken by other countries/places against food products imported from Japan, and recommendations made by international agencies including the World Health Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency on the issue.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)07

(Question Serial No. S0089)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

It is mentioned in the reply under serial number FHB157 that the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) is mindful of the cases where vegetables are brought into Hong Kong by travellers via the Lo Wu Control Point, and that in the past five years CFS had not intercepted any uninspected vegetables smuggled into Hong Kong through control points other than the Man Kam To Boundary Control Point. In this connection, please advise whether the enforcement actions have not been effective in curbing the smuggling of vegetables into Hong Kong in the name of self-consumption. Please also advise whether the Department will review the regulatory mechanism for the import of vegetables, including taking out prosecutions against persons bringing large quantities of vegetables into the territory, as a preventative measure against the import of vegetables with excessive pesticides; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon WONG Kwok-hing

Reply:

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) is mindful of the cases where vegetables are brought, in the name of self-consumption, into Hong Kong by travellers via the Lo Wu Boundary Control Point (LWBCP). CFS maintains close liaison with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) and exchanges intelligence on activities of importing vegetables through control points other than the Man Kam To Boundary Control Point (MKTBCP). To intercept such activities, C&ED and CFS conduct joint operations from time to time.

In 2015, special joint operations were conducted against passengers carrying substantial amount of vegetables into Hong Kong at LWBCP. During the operations, no evidence of sale could be found in the 15 travellers intercepted, and the vegetables were voluntarily surrendered by the travellers for disposal. Another two travellers were found to have delivered vegetables to two separate retailers for sale. On the basis of the evidence

gathered, CFS will seek legal advice as to whether prosecution should be taken out against those involved in the two cases.

The CFS and C&ED will continue to work together closely to monitor implementation of the administrative arrangement with the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China to ensure vegetables supplied to Hong Kong come from registered farms and production and processing establishments through MKTBCP. The two departments will review the monitoring work from time to time and adjust their work as necessary to ensure the integrity of the administrative arrangement.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)08

(Question Serial No. S0085)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

Please advise whether prosecution will be instituted against the importer who, without reasonable excuse, has imported carrots from the Chiba prefecture of Japan.

Asked by: Hon WONG Pik-wan, Helena

Reply:

The Centre for Food Safety will seek legal advice on the basis of the evidence gathered to decide whether prosecution will be instituted against the importer.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)09

(Question Serial No. S0086)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

Despite the Government's saying that all imported Mainland foods including vegetables, fish, meats are supplied by registered establishments on the Mainland, such an arrangement is merely an administrative order and measure without any legal binding effect. Please advise whether non-registered establishments are still allowed to import foods into the territory if relevant food standards are met.

Asked by: Hon WONG Pik-wan, Helena

Reply:

The Government is committed to enhancing food safety through a multi-pronged approach. It adopts the "from farm to table" strategy to safeguard public health by ensuring that food consumed by the public meets safety standards. This includes not only formulating and updating the legislation to govern food safety but also surveillance at the import, wholesale and retail levels and proper control at source.

As the Mainland is the major supplier of foods to Hong Kong, the Government and the Mainland authorities have established administrative arrangements under which chilled/frozen meat or poultry from the Mainland must come from processing plants registered for export to Hong Kong by the Mainland authorities. There are also similar administrative arrangements under which vegetables and aquatic food animals must come from registered farms and production and processing establishments under the supervision of the relevant Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau. Every year, officers of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) inspect some of these registered establishments on the Mainland to ensure that the foods imported are wholesome and safe at source.

Notwithstanding the above administrative arrangements, CFS will ensure that all food imported for sale in Hong Kong, whether they be imported into Hong Kong from the Mainland or other countries, must comply with the legal requirements governing food safety

and are fit for human consumption. CFS enforces the law by conducting surveillance at the import, wholesale and retail levels through its Food Surveillance Programme. By using a risk-based approach, CFS will take food samples at the import, wholesale and retail levels for testing. The Food Surveillance Programme is thus a key component to ensure food safety at the downstream of the food supply chain. Where CFS detects foods that violate the relevant legal requirements, CFS will follow up rigorously including, where appropriate, taking out prosecutions. If these foods are imported from the non-registered establishments of the Mainland, CFS will inform the relevant Mainland authorities so that they could follow up by tracing the source at their end. The Mainland authorities will then investigate and take appropriate follow up actions.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)10

(Question Serial No. S0087)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

Please provide information on the manpower of the "Intelligence Unit" of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, as well as the detection of vegetable and freshwater fish smuggling activities and the mechanism employed.

Asked by: Hon WONG Pik-wan, Helena

Reply:

The Intelligence Unit (IU) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department) has 57 staff. It is headed by a Chief Health Inspector and comprises four Intelligence-cum-Raiding Teams (IRT) & four Anti-littering Enforcement Teams (AET). The IRT is tasked, among others, to handle complaints of sale of frozen/chilled meat as fresh meat, sale of meat from dubious sources and illegal slaughtering. The AET is tasked to take enforcement actions against littering offences in plain clothes. The IU also provides intelligence support services to other units of the Department (including the Centre for Food Safety (CFS)) in dealing with complicated cases.

Upon receipt of information about vegetable or freshwater fish smuggling activities, the IU will conduct preliminary investigation into the cases. Where there is prima-facie evidence, the IU will render assistance in mounting joint operations with CFS and, if necessary, the Customs & Excise Department to curb the smuggling activities.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)11

(Question Serial No. S0084)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

In respect of the provision “the place from where the food was imported” under Section 22(1)(c) of the Food Safety Ordinance (Cap 612), please advise whether the term “the place” refers to a country, a city or a prefecture; and how actions can be taken against the five categories of food from the five prefectures of Japan if only the country of origin is required to be stated in the importer’s declaration.

Asked by: Hon WONG Pik-wan, Helena

Reply:

Under Section 22(1) of Food Safety Ordinance (Cap. 612), a person who, in the course of business, imports food must record the information about the acquisition of the food. The required information includes the place from where the food was imported as stated in Section 22(1)(c) of Cap. 612. The information enables traceability of the imported food.

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) requires importers of Japanese food to provide relevant import documents such as invoice, airway bill/bill of lading, packing list and health certificate, whichever applicable, showing the prefectures of Japan from where the food comes. CFS will also check the labels on the packing against the documents. Particular attention is paid to food items imported from the five prefectures of Japan subject to import control under the Food Safety Order issued in March 2011.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)12

(Question Serial No. S0128)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

1. This is a follow-up question on the replies under serial numbers FHB(FE)160 and FHB(FE)108 (question serial numbers 3049 and 0015).

With regard to the inspection of farms exporting food animals to Hong Kong, it is indicated in the Estimate of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department) that the number of inspections in 2014 was 49 with an actual expenditure of \$8.5 million, while the estimated number of inspections in 2015 is 60 with an expenditure of \$10.2 million. In other words, the average expenditure on each inspection is \$170,000. Furthermore, the reply under serial number FHB(FE)108 reveals that the inspections were conducted at places as far as Chile, European countries, the United States, and even Iceland. Please provide additional information on the following, including:

- (a) the manpower for each inspection conducted outside Hong Kong;
- (b) the average expenditures on conducting inspections of farms on the Mainland and in overseas countries respectively; and
- (c) whether the advice given by the Department to the farms inspected has any binding effect; if not, whether any assessment has been made on the necessity of conducting such inspections.

Asked by: Hon WONG Pik-wan, Helena

Reply:

- (a) An inspection unit comprising three veterinary officers, eight field officers and one fisheries officer is responsible for inspection of food animal farms (including fish farms) outside Hong Kong, including the Mainland and overseas. Normally, a team of at least two staff would conduct a farm inspection.

- (b) We do not keep separate breakdown on the resources used for inspection in the Mainland and inspection conducted overseas.
- (c) Where irregularities are observed in an inspection, the Centre for Food Supply (CFS) would provide recommendations to the relevant authority outside Hong Kong. Normally, the authority will ensure that the irregularities are rectified and notify CFS when the required actions have been taken. The inspection plan is reviewed and adjusted from time to time based on risk assessment and inspection findings.

- End -