

**For discussion
on 11 July 2006**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Work of the Centre for Food Safety

Purpose

This paper briefs Members about the work of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) established under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

Background

2. At the meeting held on 17 January 2006, Members were briefed on the proposal to establish a CFS within the FEHD as our next step for enhancing food safety. With the appointment of the Controller, CFS on 2 May 2006, the Food Surveillance and Control Division and the Risk Assessment and Communication Division of the FEHD were subsumed under the CFS on the same day.

Mission and Vision of the CFS

3. The CFS aims to protect the health of people in Hong Kong through the development and implementation of effective food safety control measures. As the enhancement of food safety requires tripartite efforts of the government, the trade and consumers, the CFS will work as productive partners with the trade and consumers to ensure that food available for sale in Hong Kong is safe, wholesome and fit for human consumption. The CFS will also work closely with the international food organizations and the relevant authorities of the countries / regions exporting food to Hong Kong to achieve its objectives.

4. The CFS adopts a risk analysis framework promulgated by

international food safety authorities which entails risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. A multi-disciplinary team approach is adopted to ensure food safety. In addition to food chemist, veterinary related professional and public health physician, other food experts of the CFS include nutritionist, food biotechnologist, food toxicologist and food scientists. There are about 410 staff at the CFS at its establishment and steps have been taken to recruit some additional 60 new staff in the coming several months, to strengthen various work areas which are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Work Plan for 2006/07

Food surveillance and Control

5. Food surveillance, safety control of imported food and management of food incidents are key components of the food safety control regime in Hong Kong. The CFS will enhance its work on food surveillance and sampling. In addition to the some 61 000 samples collected per annum, it is anticipated that about 2 000 additional samples will be collected in 2006. Additional staff will also be deployed to handle the increasing number of food complaints.

Enhanced Liaison and Contact With Mainland And International Food Safety Authorities

6. We will increase our contact and communication with international food safety organizations as well as food authorities of those countries / regions which export food to Hong Kong for sharing of knowledge and information. In particular, the CFS will strengthen contact and cooperation with the relevant Mainland authorities, including the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ), Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce, local Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureaux, the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Shenzhen Municipal Government, to enhance communication on major food incidents and to deal with any food safety matters that may have cross-border implications. Since the setting up of the CFS, the Controller has visited the AQSIQ and the State

Food and Drug Administration in Beijing in May. In June, the CFS participated in the Annual meeting of the Inspection and Quarantine authorities of Guangdong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and HKSAR. The CFS also attended the Twenty-Ninth Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) in July to keep up with the latest development in food standards and related programmes.

International Symposium on Food Safety

7. To foster partnership and promote collaboration with international and local food safety professionals, the CFS will hold an international symposium on Food Safety in Hong Kong in January 2007. Speakers from international and national food authorities and agencies will be invited to speak and to share experience in risk management, risk assessment and communication.

Risk Assessment and Communication and Enhancing Transparency

8. Risk assessment forms the scientific basis of risk management and communication in the risk-based food safety control model adopted by the CFS. For better protection of public health, the CFS will conduct more risk assessment studies, as well as monitoring food standards and practices on food safety developed by international food agencies and authorities.

9. The CFS will step up disseminating information to the public and the food trade in a more timely and frequent manner through different channels (e.g. the website of the CFS, e-mails, Announcements of Public Interest on television and radio, pamphlets, seminars, workshops, etc) to address the public concern on food safety. The CFS will host a Food Safety Day on 26 August to enhance the awareness of the public and the trade on the prevention of cross contamination of raw and ready-to-eat food.

Strengthening Communication with Stakeholders

10. Food safety requires tripartite effort from the government, the trade and consumers. To strengthen communication with the trade,

CFS will hold regular consultation forums. A meeting with the respective food trade was held in May. The next meeting with the trade is scheduled for end July to gather views on various issues of concern. Separately, the CFS will establish a consumer liaison group to solicit public views on matters relating to food safety. Recruitment of members to the liaison group will commence in July. The CFS will also conduct surveys to collect public views on food safety. Feedback from trade consultation forums, consumer liaison groups and public survey findings will be useful for the CFS to formulate better risk communication strategies as well as fostering tripartite work partnerships in enhancing food safety.

Inter-departmental Cooperation on Food Safety

11. The CFS will work closely with the relevant government departments to enhance food safety in Hong Kong. For example, the CFS has been working very closely with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Customs and Excise Department and the Hong Kong Police to prevent the landing of freshwater fish without health certificate in Hong Kong.

Expert Committee on Food Safety

12. To strengthen the consultative framework on food safety, an Expert Committee on Food Safety will be set up within the CFS in the coming months. The Expert Committee will consist of academics, professionals, food experts, trade and consumer representatives and other experts and is responsible for advising the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene in the formulation of food safety measures, review of food safety standards in light of international practices, trends and developments, as well as risk communication strategies.

Way Forward

13. The CFS will review its work priorities regularly to ensure that Hong Kong people will enjoy safer and healthier food. The CFS will also make use of the best available science and evidence to guide

their decision making process and make reference to international best practice in their work.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note and comment on the work of the CFS.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Centre for Food Safety
July 2006**