

**For Discussion
On 12 June 2007**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Regulation of Vegetables and Fruits

PURPOSE

This paper briefs members on the measures adopted by the Administration on the regulation of vegetables and fruits.

BACKGROUND

2. In 2006, Hong Kong imported over 670 000 tonnes of vegetables and about 950 000 tonnes of fruits, of which about 81% of vegetables and 15% of fruits were imported from the Mainland.

EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES

3. At present, there is no legislation regulating the import of vegetables or fruits. Under our administrative arrangement with the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, all vegetables imported from the Mainland should come from registered vegetable farms supplying Hong Kong (registered farms) or other associated processing companies (processing companies). When vegetable vehicles arrive at the Man Kam To Food Control Office (MKTFCO), staff of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) will conduct inspection to verify that the vegetables and fruits are sourced from registered farms or collection stations. The CFS staff will also check the inspection cards and certificates of pesticide usage issued by the relevant Mainland entry-exit inspection and quarantine bureaux in respect of the vegetable consignments. The MKTFCO of the CFS also takes random

samples of imported vegetables for screening and tests for pesticide residues. The pesticide residues tested include those commonly used in agriculture, such as pyrethroids, as well as those that cause serious and immediate health effects like methamidophos and isocarbophos. All the tests for methamidophos and isocarbophos residues in vegetables are completed within one working day. Since there is no legislation regulating the pesticide residue levels in Hong Kong at present, the standards adopted in enforcement are made with reference to international standards.

4. Apart from conducting tests on imported fruits and vegetables at the land boundary control point, the CFS also takes samples of fruits and vegetables at wholesale and retail levels for tests under its regular food surveillance programme. A total of 23 000 vegetable samples and 1 000 fruit samples were tested by the CFS in 2006.

ENHANCED MEASURES TAKEN

5. In view of the growing public concern over regulation of vegetables and fruits, the Administration has adopted a number of measures to strengthen control on imported vegetables and fruits to ensure food safety.

Control at Source

6. On strengthening control at source, the Mainland authorities agreed to implement a series of enhanced inspection and quarantine measures by phases since April 2007 after discussion with the Administration. The measures included requiring proper packaging with relevant information for leafy vegetables supplied to Hong Kong. The information to be provided includes the names and addresses of the farms, registration numbers and production dates. The inspection and quarantine authorities also supervise the packaging process of vegetables and seal the vegetable transportation vehicles. The requirement will be further extended to cover all vegetables supplied to Hong Kong from October this year. As regards fruits, we will continue to discuss with the Mainland authorities on ways to enhance their safety.

Joint Inspections

7. The CFS has stepped up cooperation with relevant departments, including the Customs and Excise Department (Customs) and the Hong Kong Police Force (Police), in conducting *ad hoc* blitz operations on vehicles carrying vegetables at Man Kam To Boundary Control Point. At present, Customs officers are authorized to intercept cross-boundary vehicles suspected of breaching the laws enforced by the Customs. The FEHD may also stop and inspect vehicles that are suspected, on the basis of intelligence or any other reasons, of carrying food unfit for human consumption. We consider the current practice of conducting joint *ad hoc* operations by the FEHD and the Customs to be effective for daily operation of the Boundary Control Point. In 2006, over 28 000 vegetable vehicles (38% of the estimated total) were inspected at the Man Kam To Control Point amongst which 17 were detained and a total of 23 tonnes of problematic vegetables were destroyed. Under the existing *Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance*, any person who sells any food unfit for human consumption is liable to a fine of \$50 000 and imprisonment for six months.

Targeted Surveillance

8. We also conduct targeted surveillance on food items of public concern from time to time. To monitor the safety of fruits, the CFS took about 350 fresh fruit samples (covering some 40 kinds of fruits such as apples, oranges, bananas, mangoes and strawberries) from supermarkets, market stalls and fruit shops in late 2006 to test for pesticide residues and heavy metals. The results were all satisfactory. In addition, the CFS also analyzed the presence of *E. coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Salmonella* in another 136 fruit samples. All these microbiological test results were satisfactory.

Extension of Man Kam To Food Inspection Facilities

9. With the steady increase in the volume of Mainland food supplied to Hong Kong, the facilities at the Man Kam To Boundary Control Point are stretched beyond their capacity. Therefore, the authorities concerned are actively exploring ways to expand the facilities for inspecting imported food, including extending the space and facilities, to cope with different types of transport vehicles. In studying the issues, we will also take into account the current mode of transport arrangement of the food industry and its development. For instance, most of the vehicles that transport vegetables and fruits reach the control point during its last two operation hours (i.e. between six to eight p.m.) with a view to facilitating the delivery of fresh vegetables and fruits to wholesale markets for distribution early next morning.

Enacting Legislation on Regulation of Pesticide Residues

10. To better safeguard the safety of imported vegetables and fruits, the CFS is drawing up legislation on regulation of pesticide levels in food. The law would be both suitable for Hong Kong and in line with international standards. The expert group concerned is conducting studies on the maximum residue limits (MRL) of pesticide in drawing up the legislation. It plans to finalize the legislative proposal for submission to the Legislative Council within this year.

Enacting Food Safety Legislation

11. To strengthen control over food safety, the Administration is working on a new Food Safety Bill that requires registration of food importers. Under the new Bill, the Administration will first bring under regulation foods with higher food safety risks or of wide public concerns, such as vegetables and fruits. It may also consider requiring importers to furnish import licence or health certificates as appropriate. The new Bill will also require all traders to keep proper records to facilitate the Administration in tracing the source of food when necessary.

ADVICE SOUGHT

12. Members are invited to note and comment on the above measures.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Centre for Food Safety
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