

# **Report of the Work of Centre for Food Safety**

Food and Health Bureau  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
Centre for Food Safety

July 2007

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The people of Hong Kong have high expectations on what the Government can do to ensure food safety. More now than ever before, food incidents are catching the public's attention and making popular news headlines, and food safety issues are taking a more prominent place in the Government's agenda. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) was established on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2006, under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, to enhance food safety regulatory functions and to meet the growing public expectation for better food safety standards.

Hong Kong imports over 90% of its food, and with the sheer diversity of food that comes from around the world, promoting food safety in Hong Kong is a unique and complicated task. In devising the local food safety control regime, the Government is mindful of striking a balance between regulation and the maintenance of the variety and stability of the food supply. The setting up of the CFS, a major step of the Government to fulfil this mission, was far from being just the renaming of the former staff and structure. The creation of the CFS heralds a fundamental shift in the approach, culture and mentality to realise effective control along the whole food chain. The CFS adopts the science-based risk analysis approach promulgated by international food safety authorities to strengthen food safety control measures throughout the food chain, starting from farm audits, to import control, to food surveillance at the import, wholesale and retail levels.

*"Food Safety must be addressed along the entire food chain by measures based on sound scientific information at both national and international levels."*

*- World Health Organization*

In promoting food safety, the CFS emphasizes active tripartite collaboration among the Government, the food trade and the consumers. The CFS seeks to bring about transparent communications among all stakeholders, and strongly believes that cooperation and efforts from all three parties are indispensable because the key to the highest food standard can be obtained only if each party bears its own responsibilities.

With Hong Kong's heavy reliance on imported food, we are increasingly stressing the importance of communications and networks, and many of our staff is involved in communicating with our partners, in Hong Kong, in the Mainland, and overseas.

The globalization of the food trade, advancement in food technology, rapid information flow, improvements in living standard and the heightened consumers' expectations, have made the work of food safety management increasingly challenging. To cope with the changes, the CFS has a multi-disciplinary team to ensure food safety and public health protection: we have public health physicians and nurses to provide public health perspectives in our decision-making, veterinarians to ensure food safety starting from the farm level, food chemists to offer professional advice and laboratory support, food scientists, nutritionists, food biotechnologists, food toxicologists to deliver strong scientific support, and health inspectors to enforce our regulations.

In the past year, the Centre has been making progress, with accomplishments in some areas, and valuable lessons learnt in others. Response of the media and the public to different food incidents has accentuated the need for swift information flow and for comprehensive publicity on the whole concept of food safety control. While we need to increase consumers' awareness on food safety, we have to be cautious not to make people overreact to food incidents. More effort is demanded of us to share information, communicate more effectively and to ensure that stakeholders in the food chain fully participate. The Centre takes the views of our stakeholders seriously and we always critically reflect on our performance. In the first year of operation, the CFS has taken major steps to lay the foundation to revamp our existing regulatory framework, to build up a more effective food safety control regime and to devise a proactive public education and publicity programme.

This report reflects on the progress and achievements of the CFS in different areas in the past year and sets out the Centre's major upcoming initiatives.

## Chapter 2 An International Perspective

- ✦ Global Changes
- ✦ Global Trends in Food Safety Framework
- ✦ Hong Kong: A Gastronomic Melting Pot for 7 Million People

### GLOBAL CHANGES

We are now witnessing a most profound and dynamic changing world and the food industry is one of the fastest changing industries. It is not possible to ignore the international context in which our local food safety control takes place.

Over the past decade, no continent has been spared of the occurrence of food incidents and outbreaks of food-borne disease, and the relevant public health and social impact. Recent dramatic episodes of food-borne diseases as well as animal disease outbreaks, such as avian influenza, have raised concerns about the effectiveness of current food safety control systems in protecting consumers, and have thus sparked increased focus on the regulatory frameworks that govern food safety and the food trade.

Furthermore, concerns over microbiological hazards, chemical contaminants, the inappropriate use of food additives, pesticides and veterinary drugs, as well as heightened consumer interests in diet-related health issues, have further raised the profile of food safety control systems. Some examples of recent food safety concerns include:

- Mad cow disease or bovine spongiform encephalopathy
- Spinach salad contaminated with *E.Coli* O 157 bacteria
- Dioxin contaminated animal feed
- Sudan dyes in various food products

Several important aspects of food production and control have contributed to the increasing complexity of food safety issues:

- **Globalisation of food supply:** Nowadays food grown in one country can be transported and consumed halfway across the world. Whilst this results in a wider variety of high quality foods being accessible, affordable, even improving nutritional status and health, it also presents challenges unseen before for safe food production and distribution. Novel foods (i.e. foods that have not traditionally formed part of the local diet) now appear regularly.
- **Urbanisation:** Increased urbanisation has led to greater requirements for transport, storage and preparation of food. The movement of people away from primary production areas inevitably results in an elongation of the food chain with the unwanted increased potential of the introduction of food-borne hazards along this chain.
- **Living standards and change of lifestyles:** A change in eating patterns to an urban lifestyle mean that “fast food” gains popularity and people eat much of their food away from home or have food prepared by commercial operations. Food incidents taking place in food outlets naturally increase and have wider implications to the community than in the past.
- **Intensification of livestock production:** The push to produce more livestock more efficiently and cheaply has led to an overemphasis on intense, lower cost production practices which is not conducive to animal health, generates environmental concerns, and ultimately food safety concerns. Problems arising from poor primary production practices include food-borne infections such as *Salmonellosis* and *Campylobacteriosis*, excessive veterinary drug residues and microbial resistance to antimicrobials. On the other hand, better bio-security, such as segregation of land and water fowl production is recognized, inter alia, as an essential step to prevent the outbreak of avian influenza which dominates today’s global health and food safety agenda.
- **Technologies and mass production of processed foods:** Technology is changing the world in different aspects, and the food industry is of no exception. New technologies such as genetic engineering and irradiation may increase agricultural production, but further on-going research on their impacts is required. Technological advances enable

the manufacture of more and more processed food at lower cost with longer shelf-lives, which may appeal to consumers as ready-to-eat foods continue to stay fresh. Such development, however, must be balanced against concerns regarding excessive use of additives and chemicals.

## **GLOBAL TRENDS IN FOOD SAFETY FRAMEWORK**

Internationally, great strides have been made in recent years with regards to updating food safety frameworks in response to the significant challenges outlined above.

- **Establishment of food safety authorities:** In the past decade, new food safety agencies were created by different countries, such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (1997), the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (1999), the Food Standards Agency (UK, 2000), the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (Singapore, 2000), the Food Safety Commission of Japan (2001), the French Food Safety Agency (2002), the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (2002), and the European Food Safety Authority (2004). The creation points to increased awareness on the part of the regulators in tackling new food safety challenges. These agencies create a credible and visible body with the broad aim of increasing transparency, which in turn, bolsters public acceptance and confidence. Most of these authorities were established in response to the concerns of society stemming from major food safety incidents, which then translated into a radical change in the policy within the national governments.
- **Integrated approach to food safety:** Food safety policies apply to the whole industry from “farm to table” and across all food sectors. The “through chain management” policies cover feed production, primary production, food processing, storage, transport and retail sale. This allows the food safety authorities to have control at source or to prevent the happening of food incidents at an early stage, as well as ensuring a prompt and effective response when food incident arises.
- **Roles of stakeholders:** It is necessary to provide a clear delineation of the responsibilities of the stakeholders. Primary producers and food operators have the primary responsibility for food safety whilst

authorities audit this responsibility through surveillance and control systems. The increased collaboration between the Government and the food industry is a win-win situation. Administrations can better monitor the industry whilst the industry benefits from improved consumer confidence and not being subject to constant food crises and regulatory reform. Consumers are also responsible for ensuring that they properly store, handle and cook food.

- **Traceability:** Successful food safety enforcement demands traceability of foods, including obligations on the food businesses to withdraw food from the market when the food may be hazardous to the consumers. Operators must also keep adequate records to facilitate this tracing.
- **Risk analysis:** The risk analysis framework has been the cornerstone of food safety control. Many national food safety authorities use risk analysis as a tool in setting food safety measures for their population whilst ensuring that imported foods meet the same level of public health protection. The overall goal of any food safety control system is to provide a systematic approach to all control and inspection activities, through a managed programme based on sound scientific principles and appropriate risk analysis, leading to careful targeting of inspection and controlling of resources.
- **Harmonisation of food standards:** The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) is an intergovernmental body that coordinates food standards at the international level. Codex recommendations, which are recognized by the World Trade Organization for trade purposes, are increasingly being used by governments to determine and refine policies and programmes under their national food control systems. It should be noted that many local food products may not have Codex standards, necessitating the assessment of other food standards (e.g. the Mainland's) in parallel.
- **Legislation:** Recent legislation has departed from traditional views on the management and enforcement of food safety issues. Recent developments take a horizontal approach to food safety, outlining general principles and objectives that the food industry is expected to meet. This shift in food safety philosophy has enabled legislation to











emphasise the prevention of food safety problems rather than take the reactive approach of yesteryear.

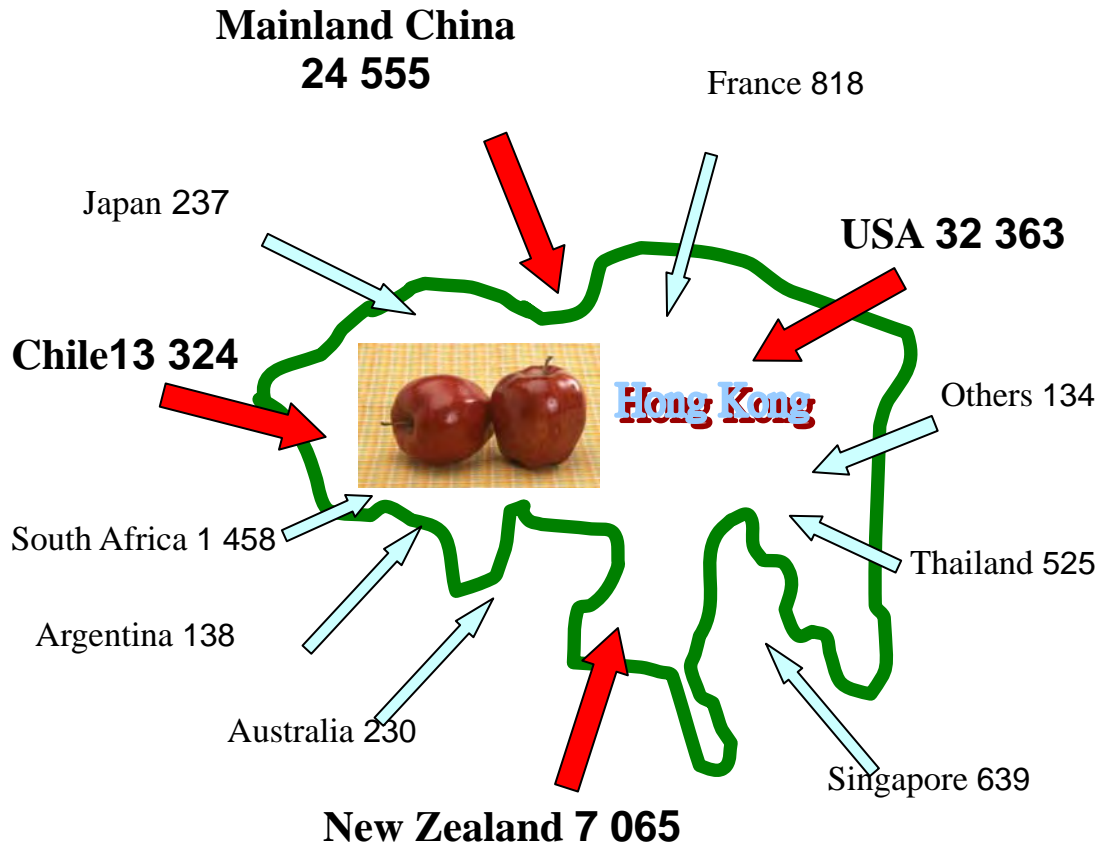
### ***HONG KONG: A GASTRONOMIC MELTING POT FOR 7 MILLION PEOPLE***

With over 90% of our food being imported, it is plainly obvious that in no place is the role of international produce more relevant than Hong Kong. For example, in 2006, Hong Kong imported over 320,000 tonnes of rice, 178,000 tonnes of pork and almost 13 million heads of live poultry. On a daily basis, we consume over 1,400 tonnes of vegetables, 1,620 tonnes of fruit and 4 million poultry eggs. By its very nature as a free port, Hong Kong receives food produce from all over the world, which means both unequalled access to food varieties and challenges to the food safety control systems.

#### ***In 2006, each day we consumed :***

1,620 tonnes of fruits		1,440 tonnes of vegetables	
50 000 heads of live poultry		4 000 000 eggs	
100 tonnes of freshwater fish		280 tonnes of marine fish	
130 heads of live cattle		5,400 heads of live pig	

## WHERE DO OUR APPLES COME FROM?



*Being in a free port, the Hong Kong population is able to enjoy food products from around the world  
(Figures for 2006, in tonnes)*

No system can ever remain static as new and emerging challenges demand an adaptable system, which are reflected in the international trends described above. The CFS has been continuously assessing the effectiveness of the local food safety regime, and has been embarking on many initiatives to improve the situation, in pace with international trends. The progresses of the CFS elaborated in the ensuing Chapters, which are broadly in the same directions as international developments, will present a clear picture on the steps and plans of the CFS, in realizing its goal of ensuring safe food for the community.

## Chapter 3 Ensuring Safety of Imported Food

- Hong Kong's Unique Food Supply
- Collaboration with Mainland Authorities
- Promoting Traceability of Imported Food
- Strengthening Inspection at the Border
- Comprehensive Legislative Control Regime

### **HONG KONG'S UNIQUE FOOD SUPPLY**

With over 90% of the food on sale in Hong Kong imported (with the Mainland as the major source), food safety control in Hong Kong is faced with many unique challenges. Control at source and monitoring at the border control points are essential for ensuring food safety in Hong Kong. Close collaboration between the CFS and exporting partners, in particular the Mainland, in monitoring at the early points of the food chain, is crucial to ensuring that only safe food enters the local market.

### **COLLABORATION WITH MAINLAND AUTHORITIES**

#### ***Close liaison with Mainland Authorities***

Since most of our food is produced outside Hong Kong and such production is not under the direct monitor of the Hong Kong authorities, it has become increasingly important to work more closely with the Mainland authorities given the share taken up by Mainland food in the local market. Notification mechanisms with the relevant Mainland authorities, including the State General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) and the Guangdong Provincial Government, were established in 2003 (updated in 2005) and 2006 respectively.

*"Hong Kong is in the unique situation that the safety of its food supply is in part dependent on the food safety controls in other jurisdictions. With Hong Kong's heavy reliance on imported food, it is essential for the Centre for Food Safety to strengthen its liaison and collaboration with authorities of its major food suppliers, in particular those of Mainland China. "*

*- Dr Patrick Wall, Chairman, European Food Safety Authority*

Close communication and collaboration between both sides is now part and parcel of daily work in order to better tackle food safety incidents related to Mainland food products.



*Dr York Chow, Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and Minister Li Changjiang of the State General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) signed the cooperation agreement in 2005*

### ***Administrative arrangements for vegetables, eggs and fish with Mainland Authorities***



Administrative arrangements for strengthening the control on the quality of imported food have been agreed with the Mainland authorities on vegetables, eggs and freshwater fish. Under these arrangements, all vegetables, eggs and freshwater fish exported to Hong Kong must be collected or harvested from registered farms and accompanied by health certificates and relevant documents issued by the respective Mainland authorities.

*Mrs Carrie Yau, Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Food and Environmental Hygiene) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, visiting the Food Laboratory of the Guangdong Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau*

## ***Inspection***

Protocols on import requirements for a number of food items, e.g. livestock, meat, have been developed with the Mainland authorities. Teams from the CFS comprising veterinarians and health inspectors conduct regular visits and audit inspection of Mainland farms and processing plants that supply food to Hong Kong, to ensure compliance with our requirements.



*CFS' Veterinary Officer conducting farm inspection at a fish farm in Guangdong*

## ***PROMOTING TRACEABILITY OF IMPORTED FOOD***

The food chain is a complex web involving importers, distributing agents, transporters, wholesalers and retailers. When a food incident occurs, the CFS strives to obtain information on the import, distribution and sale situation of the food concerned in Hong Kong, in order to take the most appropriate actions to minimise the risk to public health. Promoting traceability of food products is the key to implementing a system whereby the CFS can perform these functions effectively.

In response to the detection of Sudan Red in eggs, a voluntary enrolment system for poultry egg importers was introduced at the end of 2006. The CFS is planning to introduce a similar voluntary enrolment scheme to cover gradually other food items in 2007, to facilitate identification and tracing of the source and in determining the extent of



distribution of the food in Hong Kong. A legislative mandatory scheme is also in the pipeline. With the establishment of a trace-back mechanism, targeted recalls can be taken and information can be disseminated to consumers in a more timely manner.

*A sample enrolment form for the voluntary enrolment scheme for poultry egg importers*



*A pig at slaughterhouse with a RFID tag on its ear*

## STRENGTHENING INSPECTION AT THE BORDER

Live food animals (including pigs, cattle, goats and poultry) and vegetables imported from the Mainland pass through the Man Kam To border control point. Some 20,000 poultry are imported each day, and physical inspection and laboratory testing of diseases and chemical residues on samples are carried



*Testing imported poultry for H5 avian influenza and titre level*

out. Vegetable samples are also tested daily for pesticides control. In addition, other food products, such as meat and aquatic products, may be imported through a multitude of control points.



*Field Officer checking a vehicle carrying live poultry from the Mainland*



*Health Inspector sampling vegetables at the Man Kam To border control point for checking pesticide levels*

To strengthen the inspection work, the CFS will carry out round-the-clock import control at the waterfront offices in the Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market and the Western Wholesale Food Market. To counter in particular the problem of meat smuggling, the CFS will introduce a detector dog programme to detect undeclared imported meats into Hong Kong. There will also be regular updating of both the hardware and software for effective border control taking account of changes in the regulatory control activities and new infrastructural development.



*Dr York Chow understanding the work of colleagues at the Lok Ma Chau border control point*

For more effective enforcement action, the CFS has been working in collaboration with the Customs & Excise Department (C&ED) at Man Kam To to curb import of vegetables and freshwater fish that do not come from registered Mainland farms. To further reinforce this partnership, the CFS is exploring leveraging on the IT and computer systems of other enforcement agencies, such as the C&ED, for more efficient monitoring of the import situation.

## **COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATIVE CONTROL REGIME**

### ***Inadequate coverage of legislation***

Besides certain high-risk food items such as poultry, meat and milk, which require prior import approval and health certification before importing into Hong Kong, similar statutory import requirements currently do not apply to major food items such as eggs, fish, shellfish and vegetables etc. Apart from updating our legislation, more resources are needed to strengthen the control at border control points to extend similar requirements to other food items. With such a system in place, tracing the origins of implicated food items will be more efficient and effective.



*Field Officer conducting physical inspection of imported live pigs for injuries and clinical signs of disease at Man Kam To Control Point*



*Health Inspector checking imported live freshwater fish consignment at Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market at midnight*



## ***Comprehensive legislative regime***

To realise the goal of building in effective control along the food chain, the Administration is currently conducting a complete overhaul of existing food laws with an emphasis on source management and traceability of food. The Government aims to turn the voluntary enrolment scheme for traders into a mandatory one, to require food importers to obtain health certificates and import licences/ permits (where applicable) for food with higher risks, and to maintain records of food supplies and sales transactions. The Administration has already begun drafting legislation towards this goal for imported poultry eggs, and a similar regulatory system will be extended to other food items including aquaculture products, vegetables, fruits etc. Legislation empowering the Administration to order the suspension of sale and recall of food products is also under consideration.



*Food consignments are marked, sealed and retained in the Hong Kong International Airport, pending inspection results*

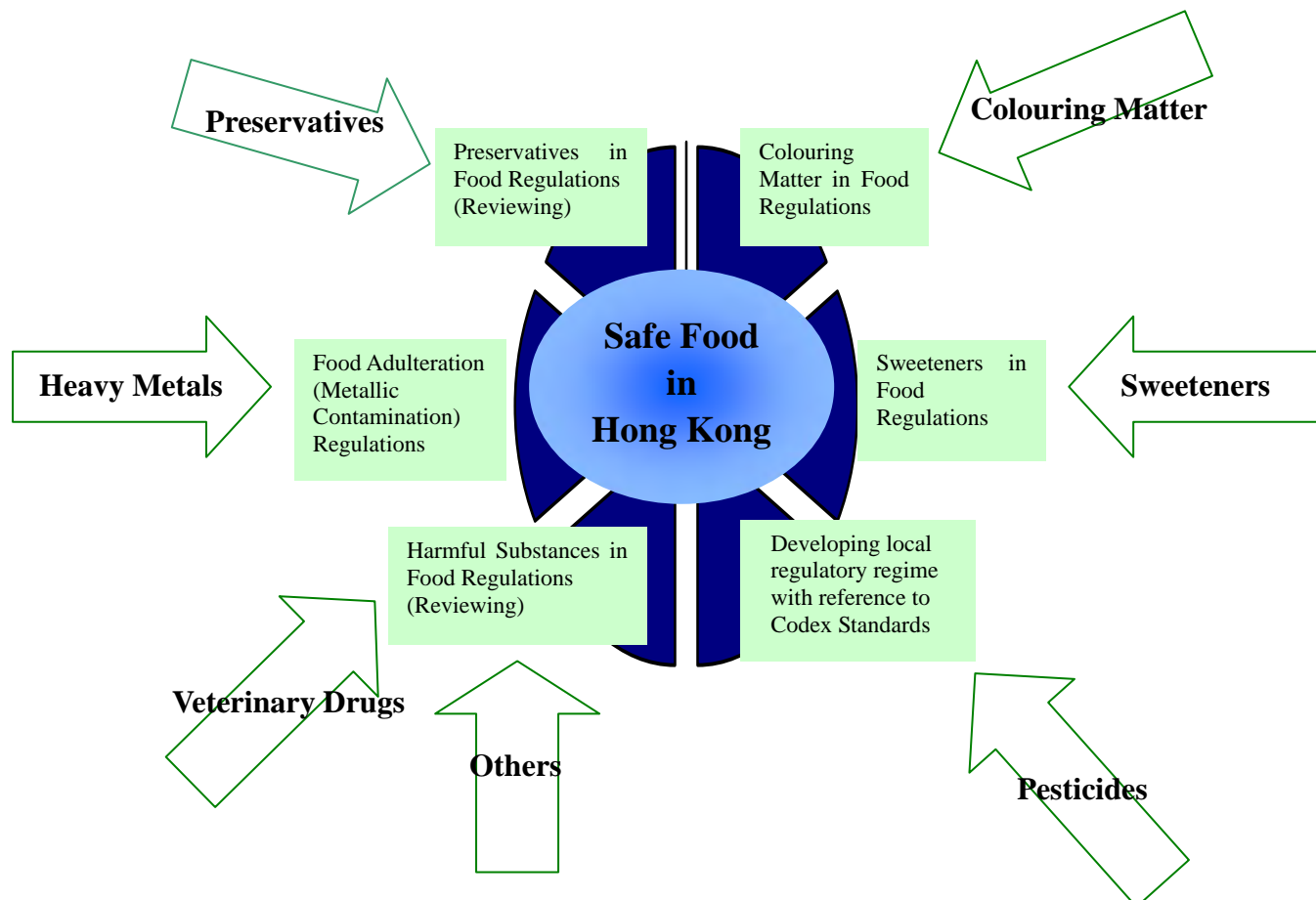


*Health Inspector checking temperature of imported chilled meat at control point in Hong Kong International Airport*

## Chapter 4 Aligning with International Food Standards

- Setting of Food Standards: *Codex Alimentarius Commission, National Authorities and Local Situation*
- Expanding the Scope of Food Standards
- Enhancing the Capacity to Assess Risks
- Incorporating Wider Perspectives

Food legislation in Hong Kong is mainly contained in the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132) and its subsidiary legislation. This Ordinance also forms the platform upon which our food standards are implemented. The food standards stipulated in the relevant subsidiary legislation control the presence and permissible level of chemicals in food. Continuous review and updates of these standards is crucial to maintaining a safe supply of food in Hong Kong.



## **SETTING OF FOOD STANDARDS: STANDARDS OF CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION**

In developing the local regulatory regime, the CFS adopts as far as possible standards set by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), which is the international standard-setting body in the area of food safety established jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization of the United Nations. Since food standards adopted by the Codex are supported by comprehensive scientific research and generally represent a global consensus on what is regarded as safe or unsafe, its adoption is one of the best tools to protect public health and to facilitate food trading. The use of the Codex standards in global trade is enshrined in the World Trade Organization agreements to which Hong Kong is a party.

## **SETTING OF FOOD STANDARDS: REFERENCE TO STANDARDS OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES**

While the adoption of the Codex standards is a major principle in setting food standards in Hong Kong, one must bear in mind that the permissible level of some chemicals in certain food products consumed in Hong Kong are not covered by the Codex standards, e.g. cyfluthrin (a type of pesticides) in Chinese kale. In setting the standards in relation to such food items, references are made to standards of other jurisdictions, in particular those of our major food-exporting partners, e.g. the Mainland. With the Mainland being Hong Kong's single largest food supplier and the similarity between the local diets and those in the Mainland, practices and standards of the Mainland are examined at an early stage when necessary, and liaison is maintained throughout the process.

## **SETTING OF FOOD STANDARDS: ASSESSING SUITABILITY OF STANDARDS IN LIGHT OF LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

Whilst much emphasis is put on the harmonisation with international standards, it is also important to take into account the local situation in establishing our standards. Risk assessment studies are conducted by the CFS' teams of food scientists and the Food Research Laboratory to scientifically assess the potential adverse health effects of different hazards on the local community, and hence provide scientific

basis for the food standards. Apart from scientific studies, the CFS also seeks expert advice and solicits views of local stakeholders for a thorough consideration of what food standards to adopt.

### **EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF FOOD STANDARDS**

The CFS has been constantly reviewing the existing food safety standards to keep abreast of international developments and to ensure that public health is adequately protected:

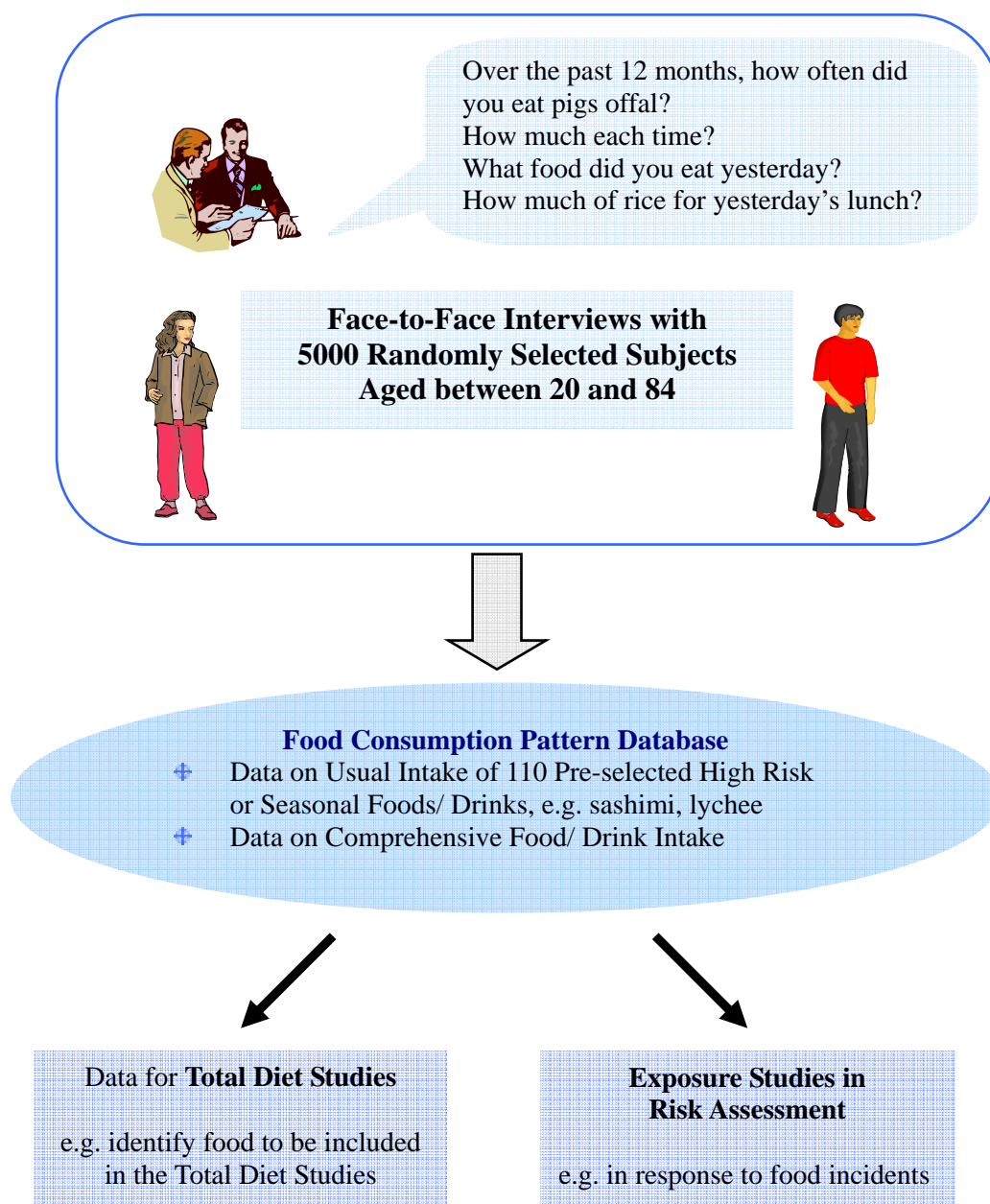
- Examine the establishment of a regulatory regime to control pesticide residues in food. References are made to the Codex standards and to standards of our major food-supplying regions, in particular the Mainland
- Review the standards on preservatives to promote harmonization with Codex standards. The Amendment Regulation is planned to be tabled at the Legislative Council in 2007
- Review the standards on veterinary drug residues to take into account latest developments internationally and to expand the scope of the control regime

### **ENHANCING THE CAPACITY TO ASSESS RISKS**

Risk assessment forms the scientific basis of food safety control and the setting of food standards. The CFS has embarked on two major initiatives to enhance its risk assessment capacity.

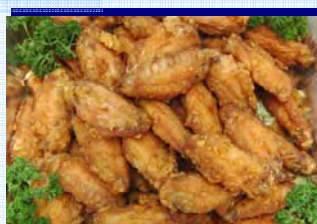
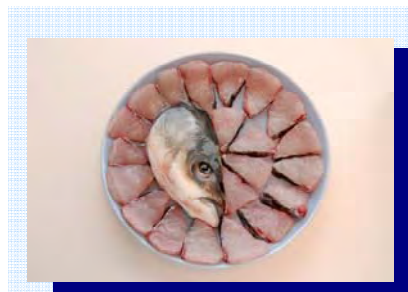
Risk from food depends not only on the nature and level of hazard present in food, but also the amount of consumption of that particular food. Updated and representative local data on food consumption is therefore essential to more accurately assess the risk to our population. The CFS is conducting the first territory-wide population-based Food Consumption Survey to collect information on the food consumption patterns of the general public in our locality. Findings from the Food Consumption Survey will be used in the Total

Diet Studies, which aim to assess the dietary exposure to chemicals and nutrients across the total diet of the population.



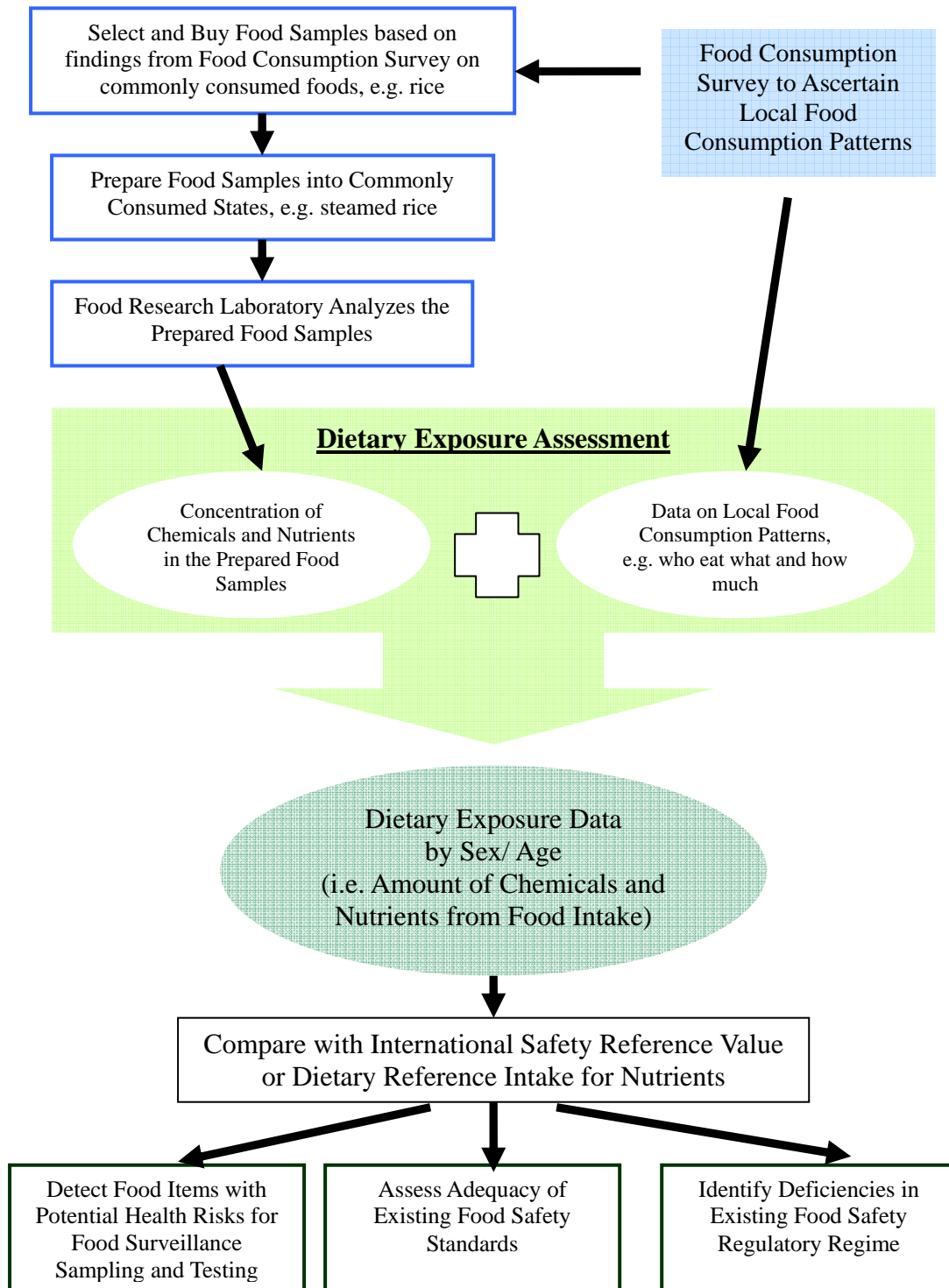
*The CFS has commissioned The Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct the first territory-wide population-based **Food Consumption Survey** to obtain data on the food consumption pattern of the local population, which will significantly contribute to the CFS' capacity in proactively identifying food risks and managing food incidents*

The Total Diet Studies focus on chemicals in the diet and analyse foods in their commonly consumed states. This will allow the CFS to proactively assess whether or not specific chemicals pose a risk to the health of the public. As Total Diet Studies measure the average amount of chemicals ingested by people of different age and sex, this will also allow the CFS to find out the population groups that are most at risk, and give out corresponding health advice. With the data from these comprehensive research projects, the CFS is also at a better position to detect food items with potential health risks for sampling and testing, more accurately assess whether certain food safety standards are adequate to protect public health, and to identify deficiencies in the food safety regulatory regime.



*Large varieties of food will be covered in the Total Diet Studies*





*The **Total Diet Studies** make use of data from the Food Consumption Survey and laboratory analyses of chemicals in food intakes to enhance the CFS' capacity in*

- *proactively identifying food with potential risks*
- *providing relevant health advice*
- *improving effectiveness of the regulatory regime*

## INCORPORATING WIDER PERSPECTIVES

In addition to scientific studies, the CFS has strengthened its consultative structure to draw expertise and advice from relevant stakeholders in its standard setting work. The Expert Committee on Food Safety, comprising academics, professionals, members of consumer group and the food trade, was set up in September 2006.



*Dr SP Mak, Controller of the Centre for Food Safety, discussing local food safety standard with Members of the Expert Committee on Food Safety*



With members from Hong Kong, the Mainland, Singapore and Australia, the Expert Committee is in an excellent position to offer advice from both a local and international perspective.

To better understand the sentiments of the public and the trade, interactive dialogues through regular consultation forums have been established, as in the case of the review of standards in the area of preservatives.



*Public health physician from the CFS explaining the proposed amendments to the regulation on preservatives at a public consultation forum*



## Chapter 5 Proactive Food Surveillance and Alert

- Food Surveillance Along Whole Food Chain
- Targeted Sampling and Surveillance Strategy
- Transparent Communication of Surveillance Results

### FOOD SURVEILLANCE ALONG WHOLE FOOD CHAIN

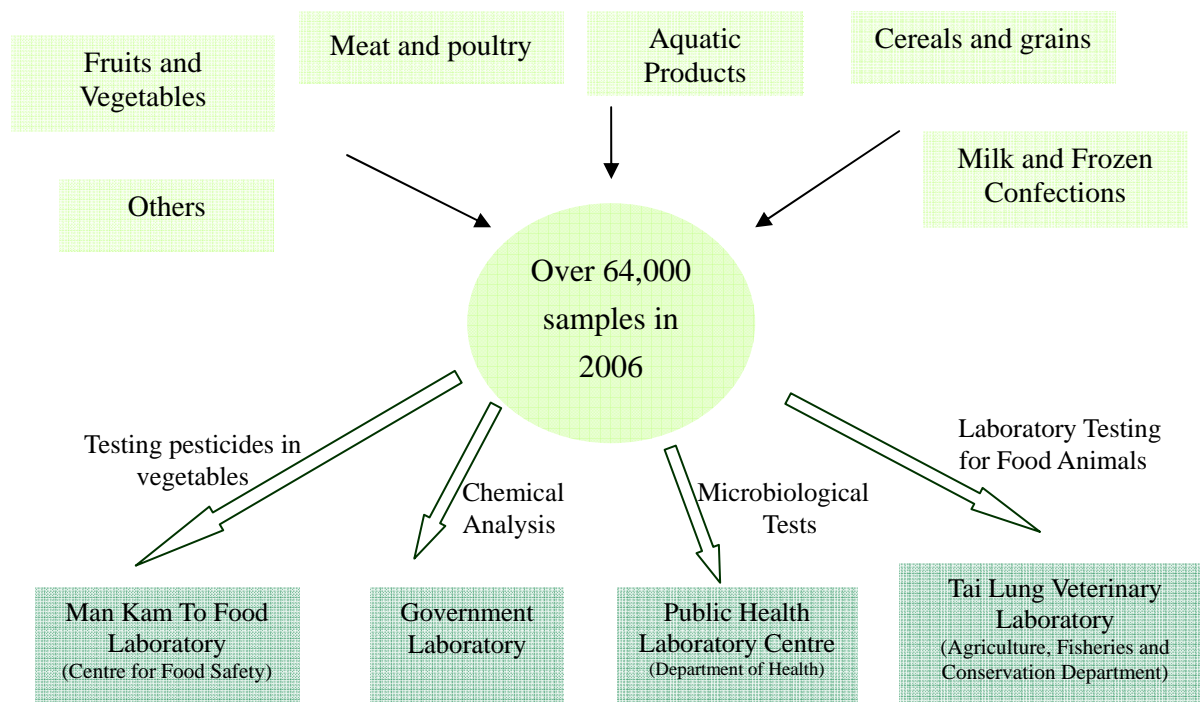
Food surveillance is a major tool of the CFS to ascertain the safety of our food supply and acts as an alert system. The CFS takes samples of a range of food items at different levels along the food chain, covering the import, wholesale and retail levels, for microbiological and chemical testing. In 2006, microbiological and chemical tests were conducted on over 64,000 food samples, and the satisfactory rate stands at over 99%.

The CFS takes into account the level of risks to public health in determining the types of samples to be collected, the frequency and the number of samples for testing. The sampling priority is under constant review, in the light of latest overseas and local risk analyses.

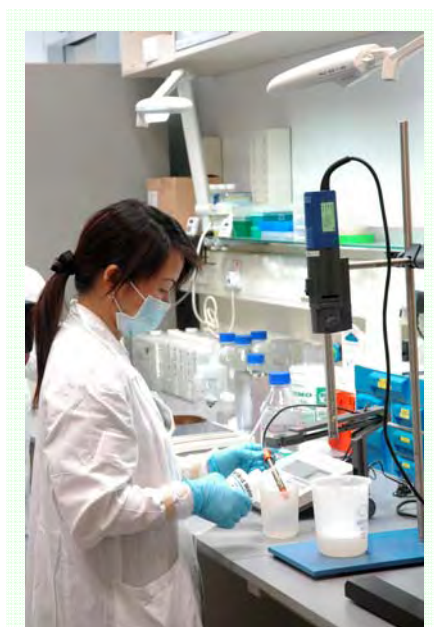


*Health Inspector conducting screening test for presence of pesticides in vegetable samples at Man Kam To border control point; samples are also passed to chemists for detailed analysis on the level of pesticides*





*CFS' food surveillance programme covers a wide range of food items and the samples collected are tested on its chemical contents and microbiological quality in various laboratories of the Government*



*Scallop samples being tested in the Public Health Laboratory Centre of the Department of Health for Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP)*



*Delegation from the Shenzhen Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau visiting the Government Laboratory*

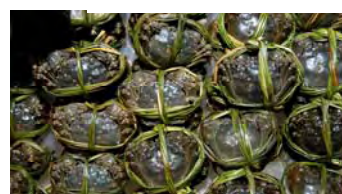
## TARGETED SAMPLING AND SURVEILLANCE STRATEGY

While surveillance on seasonal food and specific hazards was to some extent part of the CFS' food surveillance programme, the main focus of the food surveillance programme in the past was the conducting of routine surveillance as compliance checks on food products against prescribed standards or criteria. This approach was considered inadequate in terms of its capacity and efficiency to detect food safety problems proactively. An examination on the international scene also reveals the trend of shifting from routine surveillance to project-based surveillance, which represents a more focused approach on certain specified food items/ hazards, in the light of local and overseas food incidents and findings of risk assessment studies.

To keep in line with international trend and to enhance the effectiveness of the food surveillance programme, the CFS has reviewed and adjusted its strategy on food surveillance, including sampling priority. The main enhancement is the increased emphasis on project-based target food surveillance, under which the CFS proactively conducts more surveillance targeted at specific food items/ hazards. The revised food surveillance programme, which adopts a three-tier approach consisting of routine food surveillance, targeted food surveillance, and seasonal food surveillance, is more client-oriented, and provides a preventive basis for proactive interventions. Examples of targeted food surveillance include testing for formaldehyde in noodle fish, nitrite and nitrate in meat and meat products; and for seasonal food surveillance, it includes testing rice dumplings before Tuen Ng Festival, moon cakes before Mid Autumn Festival.



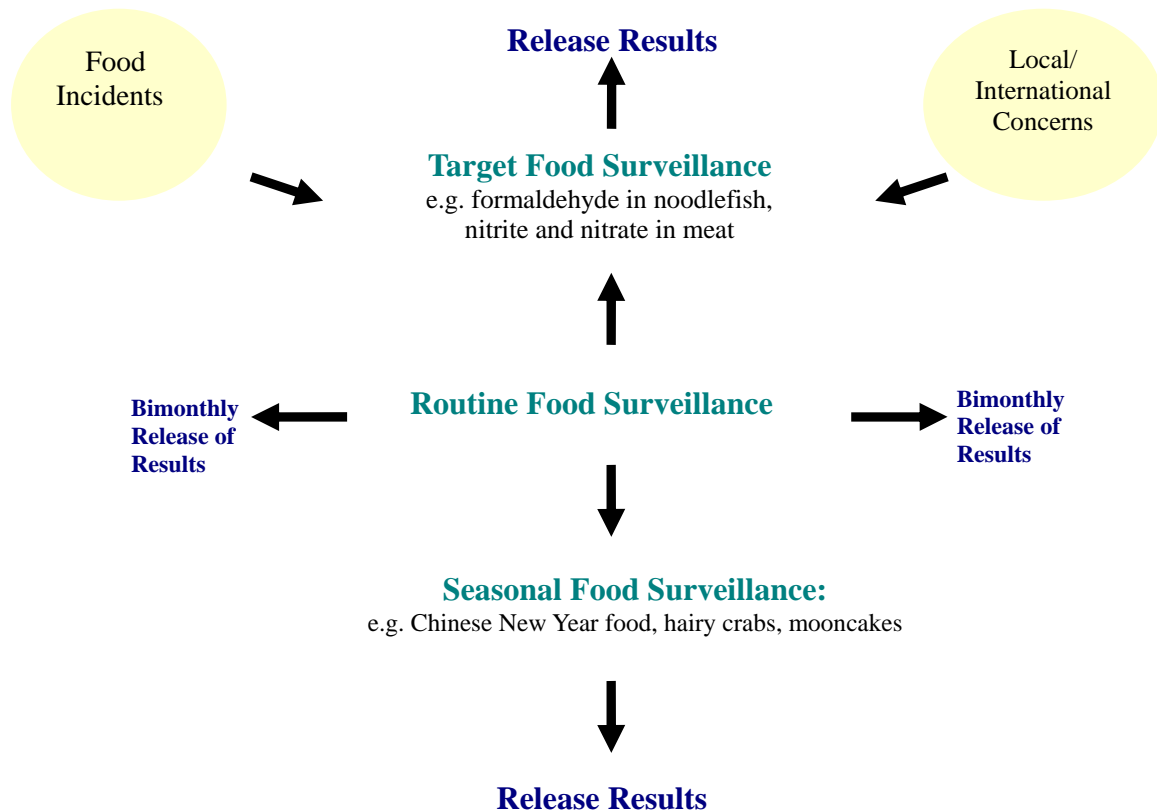
*Testing popular seasonal food items so as to facilitate consumers to make informed choices*



*"CFS' duty is not to make choices for the people, but to facilitate them to make informed choices."*

*- Professor Yuen Kwok-yung, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene*

To further enhance its surveillance on local and overseas food incidents, the CFS has also strengthened its daily monitoring on food incidents, both locally and overseas.



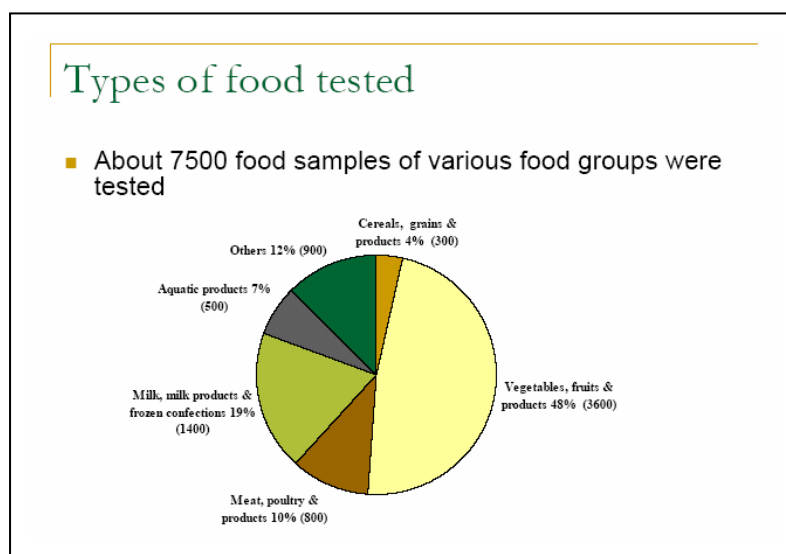
*The CFS' revised three-tier food surveillance strategy:  
routine food surveillance, target food surveillance, and seasonal food surveillance*

## TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION OF SURVEILLANCE RESULTS

Timely and effective communication of surveillance results is critical to the success of the food surveillance programme, since the public and the trade are able to take the necessary action to protect themselves and to reduce the risks only if they are informed of the situation. The CFS has reviewed different aspects of its past communications of surveillance results to the stakeholders and has introduced the following improvements:

### (a) *Timeliness and Frequency*

- Replace the annual announcement of routine food surveillance results with the regular release of Food Surveillance Reports **every two months** since early 2007
- Release the results of targeted food surveillance through Targeted Food Surveillance Report in between the Food Surveillance Reports
- Release the reports on seasonal food surveillance in batches, if applicable, and make announcement once results of initial samples are available, for the most timely communication



*The Food Surveillance Report presents data in ways useful to consumers*

*(Extract from 2007 Food Surveillance Report No.2 - March and April)*



### **(b) Information Content**

- Replace the summary data presentation (e.g. failure rates in different chemical and microbiological tests) in the routine food surveillance reports with friendly and useful presentation by **food groups** (e.g. fruits and vegetables, meat), by hazard groups (e.g. heavy metals, pesticides) and by food items or hazards of particular concern (e.g. Sudan dyes)
- Cover useful information including information on background and rationale, interpretation of findings, key messages on local situation and advice to consumers and the trade in the Targeted Food Surveillance Reports

### **(c) Communication Channels**

- Deploy a variety of channels for quick and timely communication: press release, press conference, electronic information delivery system, telephone hotline, website
- Hold the Trade Consultation Forum regularly to further strengthen communication with the trade



*Public health physicians and Senior Superintendent from the CFS briefed the media on the Food Surveillance Report at a press conference in June 2007*

## Chapter 6 Managing Food Incidents

- ✿ Minimizing Impact of Food Incidents on Local Health
- ✿ Tracing Origins of Food
- ✿ Expanding Legal Powers
- ✿ Communicating to the Public and the Trade

### **MINIMIZING IMPACT OF FOOD INCIDENTS ON LOCAL HEALTH**

With Hong Kong's heavy reliance on imported food and the varieties of food available in the local market, the CFS is vigilant about food incidents taking place locally and overseas. On a daily basis, staff assess the local impact of different food incidents identified through the food incident surveillance mechanism, and decide on the appropriate actions to minimize any impact on local health as much as possible. Our community has high expectations of the CFS in its management of food incidents and the CFS accords high priority to this area of work, as the CFS believes that consumer confidence can only be built if these incidents are handled swiftly and effectively.

In the past year, the CFS has handled food incidents of varying scales and impacts on local public health. The CFS strives to handle food incidents in a proactive manner to reduce any potential impact on local health:

- Test target food products with potential food safety problem, and make public announcement and take appropriate action when surveillance results reveal concerns, e.g. scallops found containing high level of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxin in April 2007
- Make public announcements and ask relevant suppliers to stop distributing food products suspected to be linked with food poisoning cases, e.g. the raw sea urchins related food poisoning cases in July 2006



- Make public announcements and coordinate with the trade when food safety issues of public concerns are identified from food complaint cases, e.g. oily diarrhoea caused by consumption of “oilfish” in January 2007

### **Case 1: Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Toxin Detected in Scallop**

#### **Background**

The CFS detected a high level of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxin in a scallop sample taken under the routine food surveillance programme for testing. In view of the finding, the CFS has advised the public to avoid eating this kind of scallop for the time being.

#### **Action Taken by the CFS**

The CFS traced the source of the related scallop and took more samples for testing. The CFS closely monitored the situation.

#### **Risks to Consumers**

PSP toxin is a natural toxin which can be found in bi-valve shellfish. The symptoms of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning are predominantly neurological and the onset is usually within minutes to hours after ingestion of the shellfish. Initial symptoms include tingling, numbness of the mouth and extremities and gastrointestinal discomfort such as vomiting and diarrhoea. Symptoms usually resolve completely within hours to days. In severe cases, difficulty in swallowing and speech, paralysis with respiratory arrest and even death may occur. PSP toxin is heat-stable and cannot be destroyed through cooking.

#### **Advice Given to the Public**

To avoid Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning, members of the public were advised to observe the following:

1. Buy shellfish from reliable and licensed seafood shops;
2. Remove the viscera, gonads and roe before cooking and eat a smaller amount of shellfish in any one meal;
3. Children, patients and the elderly may be susceptible to poisoning and should be cautious in consuming shellfish; and
4. When symptoms occur after consuming shellfish, seek medical advice immediately.

*After high level of toxins was found in a scallop sample tested under CFS' food surveillance programme, the CFS advised the public not to consume the relevant kind of scallop, traced the source of food and stepped up testing*



- Make public announcements and call for suspension of sale of a number of products following alerts from overseas food safety authorities, e.g. US authority issued warning on certain baby food suspected of contamination with *Clostridium botulinum* in February 2007, US authority issued warning on certain sesame tahini suspected of contamination by *Salmonella* in May 2007

### **Case 2: Voluntary Recall of Kit Kat Chocolate Bar Products in Australia Due to Possible Presence of Plastic Pieces**

#### **Background**

On 30 March 2007, the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) announced that the food manufacturer, Nestlé Australia Ltd, was voluntarily recalling two Kit Kat chocolate bar products as they may contain pieces of plastic.

All supplies of the following chocolate bars with Best Before dates up to and including 14 February 2008 are affected:

- Kit Kat Caramel (65g); and Kit Kat Cookie Dough (65g).

#### **Action Taken by the CFS**

Contacted the local distributor for more information, made an appeal to retailers to stop selling the affected products and the public not to consume them, and closely monitored the situation.

**Advice Given to the Trade:** Stop selling the affected products.

**Advice Given to Consumers:** Consumers who have purchased the affected products should stop consuming them.

*After picking up a food incident in Australia under its daily food incident surveillance mechanism, the CFS advised consumers to stop consuming the relevant chocolate products, sought information from the trade and appealed to the retailers to stop selling the products*



*Medical officers, nurses and health inspectors investigating a food premise involved in a food poisoning case*

In managing food incidents, the CFS strives not only to reduce the immediate impact of the incidents, but has also taken important follow-up measures to prevent similar problems from occurring in the future:

Major Food Incidents	Major Follow-up Actions
Sudan Dyes found in Poultry Eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopted administrative measures with the Mainland authorities, e.g. registered farms/processing plants, health certification</li> <li>Introduced voluntary enrolment scheme of importers/ distributors</li> </ul>
Oily Diarrhoea caused by Consumption of “Oilfish”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing Guidelines on naming and identification of “Oilfish” in consultation with the trade, academics and consumer group</li> <li>Prosecuted relevant traders</li> </ul>

The CFS recognizes from its experience in the past year that improvements in a number of aspects are essential to enhance its capability to manage food incidents in a more timely and effective manner, and have been pursuing a number of initiatives to bring about improvements in the relevant areas.

## **TRACING ORIGINS OF FOOD**

The food chain is a complex web involving importers, wholesalers, distributors, transporters and retailers. When a food incident occurs, the CFS needs to obtain information on the import, distribution and sale situation of the food concerned in Hong Kong, in order to take the most appropriate actions to minimize the impact to public health. The CFS however has been facing difficulties in tracing the origins of the implicated food items, which have hindered the CFS from acting promptly on some occasions. It is therefore essential to put in place a tracing system within the food business for the CFS to assess the local situation and to respond to food incidents swiftly. The following measures have been/will be taken to pave the way:

- Introduced a voluntary enrolment system for poultry egg importers at the end of 2006 in response to the detection of Sudan dyes in eggs, and extending a similar voluntary enrolment scheme to cover other high risk food items
- Creating a comprehensive database of importers, wholesalers and distributors, starting from high risk food items and to mandate the keeping of records of sales and distribution under the “one-step-forward and one-step-backward” philosophy to enable better food traceability
- Together with the Mainland authorities, examine the feasibility of applying Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) techniques to trace the origins of food and food animals

## **EXPANDING LEGAL POWERS**

Certain regulatory measures are important means for managing food incidents of high public concern effectively and swiftly. Such options are however not available due to the existing legislative set-up. To improve the situation, the CFS has been working to expand its management options for handling food incidents through legislative means:

- Introduce legislation to empower the Government to order recall of food by the trade or prohibition of sale of food with significant health implications
- Implement a mandatory notification system to require all food importers to register with the CFS, and to keep and produce records of distribution and sale

## **COMMUNICATING TO THE PUBLIC AND THE TRADE**

Timely and effective communications of relevant information to stakeholders is critical to the handling of any food incidents, as the public and the trade must be informed of the situation to allow them to take the necessary action to protect themselves and to reduce the risks. Communication and liaison with the trade is particularly important when cooperation from the trade is necessary, e.g. in voluntary food recalls. The CFS emphasizes transparency in communications and has been improving its risk communication strategies with stakeholders:

- Refine the response plan to ensure more structured and consistent response to food incidents of various scales to maximize openness and transparency
- Adopt precautionary principle and make public announcements when initial assessment reveals potential health risk of public concern, to be followed by details from further investigations



*CFS' public health physician updating the public of important information on food incident*

- Issue Food Alerts through electronic means (the Food Safety Electronic Information Delivery System) for prompt information delivery in addition to press release and press conference

- Involve representatives from the trade and consumer group in formulating food safety guidelines, e.g. in drawing up Guidelines in response to the “oilfish” case



*Working with the trade for effective response to food incidents*

- Ensure information to the public and the trade is friendly and easy to understand
- Convey messages directed at consumer protection

## Chapter 7 Communicating with Stakeholders

- Communicate to Build Partnerships
- Looking Through the Stakeholders' Eyes
- Reaching Out to Stakeholders
- Regular and Timely Communications

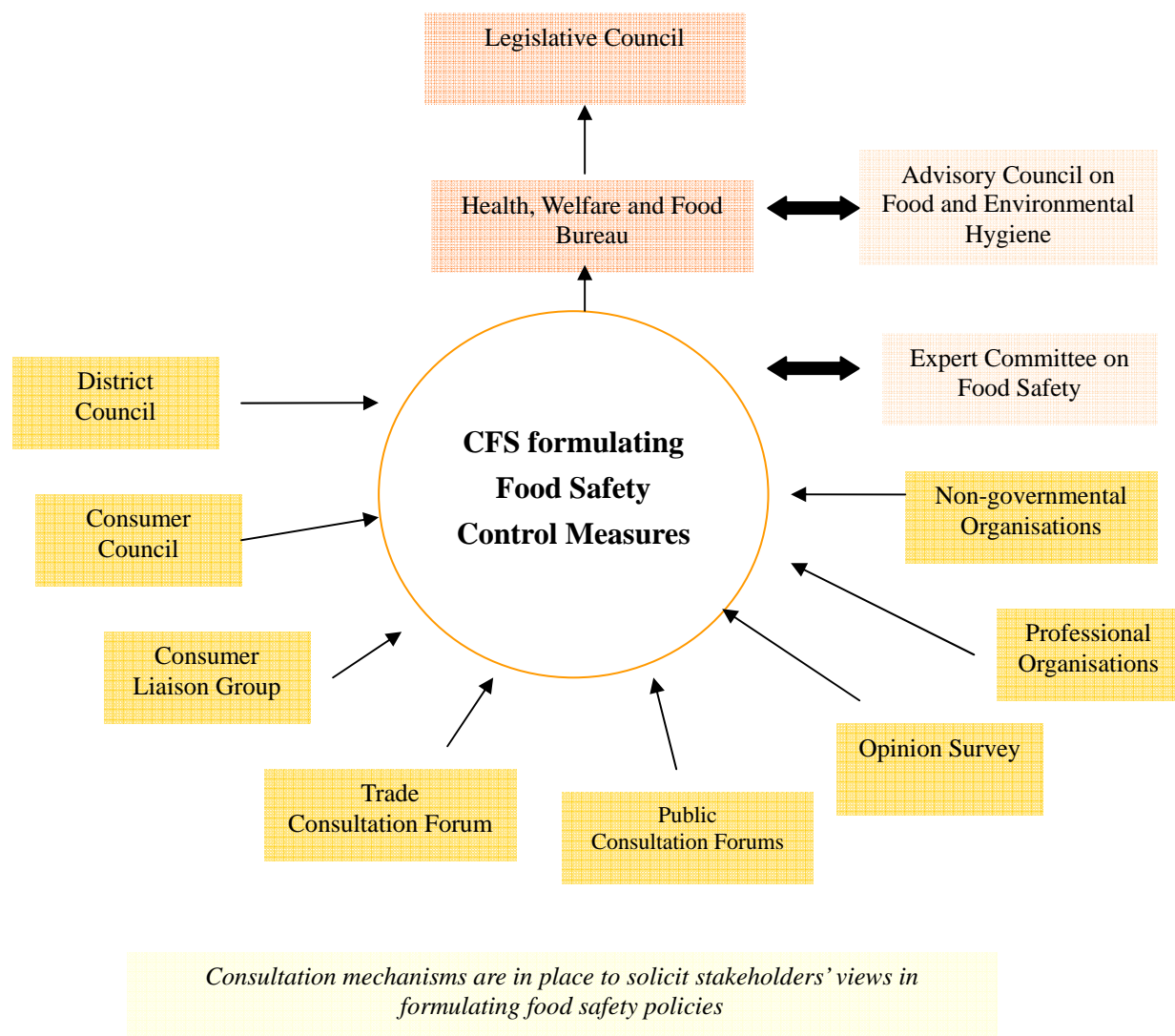
### COMMUNICATE TO BUILD PARTNERSHIP

Effective communication with stakeholders is of the utmost importance in the area of food safety. The CFS must disseminate understandable information in a transparent manner and at the appropriate time, for the stakeholders to protect themselves against, or to reduce, any food related risks. Communication is a two-way process. Through interactive exchanges, the CFS learns about the views of the stakeholders, and the stakeholders obtain information they need and voice their concerns. Effective communication is a prerequisite for building up a trusting and constructive relationship between the Government, the public and the trade, and it is only with such tripartite partnership that the highest standard of food safety can be achieved.

*“The consumer has the right to know how safe products are. Transparency about our work is a valuable asset and underpins the authority and position of the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority in society.”*

*– Mr Andre Kleinmenulman, Inspector-General,  
Belgium Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority*





The CFS strives to be proactive, transparent and timely in its communication with the public and the trade. The CFS emphasizes on understanding public perceptions. The CFS communicates with stakeholders regularly through suitable channels with clear messages that go straight to the concerns of the audience; and timely and friendly communication is particularly critical at times of food incidents to avoid confusion and unnecessary panic. To keep enhancing its communications with stakeholders, the CFS is placing increasing stress on evaluating its communication endeavours.

## LOOKING THROUGH THE STAKEHOLDERS' EYES

Only when the CFS is cognizant of the interests and expectations of the stakeholders, in particular those of the public and the trade, can it address their concerns properly in its communications. A variety of participatory initiatives have therefore been put up to actively engage different stakeholders in deliberative and interactive dialogues:

- Capitalize on the Consumer Liaison Group focus group meetings for consumers to express their views on the focus and priorities of the CFS and for the CFS to seek their views on legislative and other proposals to enhance food safety



*Dr SP Mak, Controller of the Centre for Food Safety, discussing food safety issues with members of Consumer Liaison Group at a focus group meeting, together with public health physician, food scientists and health inspector from the CFS*



- Conduct opinion surveys to obtain comments of the public on the work of the CFS and on various food safety issues



- Hold the Trade Consultation Forum for regular exchanges and discussions with the trade



*Trade representatives are actively participating at the regularly held Trade Consultation Forum*

- Establish the Expert Committee on Food Safety for professionals, academics, members of the trade and consumer groups to deliberate on major food safety control measures
- Collaborate with the Consumer Council in conducting food safety research on topics commanding consumer interests, e.g. study on labelling of allergens, trans-fats



*The CFS holding press conference with Consumer Council to release results of joint research studies on labelling of allergens in food*

## REACHING OUT TO STAKEHOLDERS

While traditional communication channels may have been widely accepted, the CFS has been developing multiple communication avenues to extend our reach in promoting speedy and interactive exchanges:

- Utilize the Food Safety Electronic Information Delivery System (FSEIDS) which delivers by email up-to-date, user-friendly and important food safety information, such as Food Alerts, to registered members
- Deliver food safety information in a lively manner through TV programmes and radio announcements
- Contribute to local newspaper columns to explain important food safety related concepts
- Launch the online newsletter of Food Safety Focus to update the trade and the public on recent food incidents and food safety information



- Conduct consultation forums and public meetings for the public and the trade to engage in direct communications with the CFS



*The CFS values face-to-face communications with the public and the trade*

- Hold discussion meetings with trade representatives to exchange views on details of proposed legislative changes

## **REGULAR AND TIMELY COMMUNICATIONS**

At times of food incidents, the CFS strives to provide the public and the trade with accurate, speedy and easy-to-understand risk information and advice through mainly press briefings and food alerts, so as to avoid information vacuums and unnecessary panic. In addition to such communications, the CFS appreciates that regular and planned communications are important in building a trusting relationship with stakeholders. The CFS therefore has formulated a comprehensive communication strategic plan to set out the CFS' communication initiatives and goals:

- Release results of food surveillance on a regular basis, e.g. announce results of the routine food surveillance every two months, supplemented by results from targeted food surveillance and seasonal food surveillance in between
- Announce findings of risk assessment studies on a regular basis, and forthcoming research topics are also announced. Risk assessment studies with findings announced in the first half of 2007 include Natural Toxins in Food Plants, Undeclared Peanut and Tree Nut Allergens in Prepackaged Foods, Nutrient Values of Fruit and

Vegetables, etc.; and the CFS is also working actively on a series of studies, including Transfat in Indigenous Food (collaborate with Consumer Council), Levels of Mercury and Methylmercury in Different Fish Species, Aluminium in Fried Fritters, Bakery and Snacks, etc.



*Consultant in community medicine and food toxicologist from the CFS presenting findings of a scientific study on natural toxins at a press conference*

To keep enhancing the effectiveness of our communications, the CFS has been investing in monitoring and establishing systematic evaluation mechanisms for its communication initiatives. Built-in project-based evaluation mechanisms are in place in relation to individual communication activities, e.g. questionnaires, post-event visits to partner organizations. In addition, the CFS is working out specially designed opinion surveys for an understanding of the public's overall views on the work of the CFS. The information gathered will be analyzed and applied to secure continuous improvement of our work.

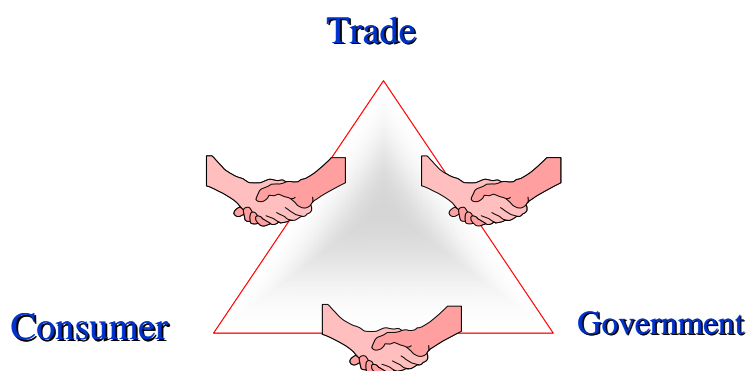
## Chapter 8 Equipping Stakeholders

- Equipping Consumers and the Trade
- Imparting the Necessary Knowledge
- Knowing the Food Better

### **EQUIPPING CONSUMERS AND THE TRADE**

Promotion of food safety is not possible without the Government, the consumers and the trade joining forces. While the Government is obliged to protect consumers from food frauds and illegal practices, members of the trade must play their part to minimize any food related risks and to ensure that the food they sell is safe; and consumers should be familiar with food hazards and ensure that they protect themselves against food related risks.

The promotion of the concept of collective responsibility however may not be readily accepted, with the traditional emphasis mainly on the monitoring and enforcement roles of the Government. It is essential for the consumers and the trade to understand the significance of this concept of tripartite collaboration, and the CFS recognises that it must equip consumers and the trade to play their parts, assisting the former to make informed choices and the latter to become increasingly accountable.



*Promotion of food safety requires the Government, the trade and the consumers to work hand in hand*

***“Food safety is a joint responsibility among the Government, the trade and the consumers.”***  
***- Professor Kwan Hoi-shan,***  
***Chairman of the Expert Committee on Food Safety***



## IMPARTING THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE

The CFS believes that through exposure to clear and understandable information related to food safety, consumers will be in a better position to make choices for themselves, and the trade will be better equipped to supply safe food. The CFS provides the necessary food safety information to the consumers and the trade through various channels, and constantly enhances the contents and modes of delivery to improve effectiveness, for example:

- Pilot the interactive Risk Perception Workshop for the public in March 2007, to provide useful information to participants on how to assess risk in context

*Food Scientist from the CFS conducting the interactive Risk Perception Workshop to enable consumers to better understand food-related risk and to make informed food choices*



- Organise a series of food hygiene seminars for the public, the trade and teachers between June and September 2007



*Roving exhibitions as part of food hygiene campaign for a larger reach of the public*



- Organise HACCP seminars for target groups, e.g. catering service providers for child care centres in 2007-08, and advise on the implementation of the HACCP system



Food scientist explaining the HACCP system to food handlers for elderly homes in 2006

- Produce a series of new publicity materials and cooking tips in response to recent food safety concerns such as natural toxins, allergenic ingredients, etc.



- Release on a regular basis the results of proactive food safety research studies throughout the year, e.g. on dietary exposure to chloropropanols of secondary school students, mercury levels in different fish species in 2007-2008; and brief the trade before the findings are released



- Distribute easy-to-understand publications, e.g. Food Safety Bulletin (For Consumers), Food Safety Express (For Food Trade), GM Food Newsletter



*The CFS' Communication Resource Unit located in Mongkok provides the public with varieties of friendly information on food safety*

The CFS will be running a major campaign in 2007 to promote the concept of tripartite collaboration, which will include a Food Safety Day, to be held in August 2007.



*Public from all walks of life enjoying and learning at the annual fun-filled Food Safety Day*



## KNOWING THE FOOD BETTER

Food labelling is an important means to assist consumers to understand more about the food they purchase and to make informed choices to protect themselves. It is also a major way to bring the food industry accountable to the buyers. The CFS inspects over 50,000 pre-packaged food items on sale at retail outlets each year to ensure compliance with legal requirements on labelling.



*Health Inspector checking expiry dates and labels of food products on sale*

The CFS is aware that public demand on food information has been growing, and believes that it is necessary to provide a wider range of information to consumers. Legislation on food labelling has been expanded and is continuously moving towards a more comprehensive system:

- Legislation requiring the detailed labelling of food additives and allergenic substances comes into effect in July 2007
- Work on legislation to introduce a Labelling Scheme on Nutrition Information for pre-packaged foods, which provides useful nutrient information to consumers and regulates nutrient-related claims
- Prepare guidelines on labelling of food items of public concern, e.g. on genetically-modified food in July 2006; preparing guidelines on the labelling of fish species causing oily diarrhoea

# 預先包裝食物標籤知多點

## Know More About the Label of Prepackaged Food



**食物名稱**  
Name of the food

- 須加上可聞標記，不得對食物性質有虛假、誤導或詐騙成分。
- It shall be legibly marked and shall not be false, misleading or deceptive to the nature of the food.

**配料表**  
List of ingredients

- 配料須按用於食物包裝時所佔的重量或體積，由大至小依次表列。
- 如含有法例中列明的食物致敏物，必須標示。
- 如使用添加劑，須標示其作用類別和名稱或國際識別編號（不論是否以“E”或“e”為詞頭）。
- Ingredients should be listed in descending order of weight or volume determined as the time of their use when the food was packaged.
- Allergenic substances stated in the law should be labelled if they are present in the food.
- Functional class of an additive and its specific name or international identification number (with or without the prefix “E” or “e”) should be specified if it is used.

**製造商或包裝商的名稱及地址**  
Name and address of manufacturer or packer

**保質期的說明**  
Indication of durability

- “此日期前食用”或“此日期前最佳”
- “Use by” or “best before” dates.

**數量、重量或體積**  
Count, weight or volume

**特別貯存方式或使用指示的陳述**  
Statement of special conditions for storage or instructions for use

預先包裝食物標籤的新規定於2007年7月10日起生效，詳情請瀏覽食物安全中心網頁。

The new labelling requirements for prepackaged food are effective from 10 July 2007. Please visit the website of the Centre for Food Safety for details.

[www.cfs.gov.hk](http://www.cfs.gov.hk)

*Legal requirements on food labelling facilitate consumers to make informed choices and bring the food trade accountable to consumers*



Labelling Requirements on Prepackaged Food		
<b>What Should be on a Food label?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Name or designation of food</li> <li>☑ List of ingredients</li> <li>☑ Indication of “best before” or “use by” date</li> <li>☑ Statement of special conditions for storage or instructions for use</li> <li>☑ Name and address of manufacturer or packer</li> <li>☑ Count, weight or volume of food</li> </ul>		Legal requirements under Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations
<i>Allergens</i>	If the food contains allergens, e.g. cereals containing gluten, crustacean, eggs, fishes, peanuts, soybeans, milk and tree nuts, the name of the substance must be specified.	Legal requirements in July 2007
<i>Additives</i>	If the food contains any food additives, its description and function must be specified.	Advisory guidelines
<i>Genetically Modified Elements</i>	Inform consumers of the GM content and declare origin of animal gene, presence of allergens, nutrition value and presence of toxins significantly different from conventional food.	To introduce legislative amendments to the Legislative Council
<i>Nutrition Information on Food Labels</i>	To introduce a Labelling Scheme on Nutrition Information for prepackaged food to facilitate consumers in making healthy food choices; encourage food manufacturers to apply sound nutrition principles in the formulation of foods which would benefit public health; and regulate misleading or deceptive labels and claims on nutrition information.	

To facilitate consumers' understanding of food labels and nutrients, the CFS has also taken the following initiatives:

- Organize workshops and devise teaching kits



*Food biotechnologist from the CFS preparing teaching kits on facts and labelling of GM food*



- Publish The Consumer Guide to Food Additives in May 2007



*The Consumer Guide provides a quick reference for consumers to better understand the food labels on food additives*

- Enhance the online “Food Nutrient Calculator” in June 2007 for the public to estimate nutrient intakes

Centre for Food Safety - Microsoft Internet Explorer

### Nutrient Information Inquiry

Calculation of Average Nutrient Quantities of Food

Delete checked item | Add another item: By Food Groups | By Food Items | New Calculation | Cancel

Report title:





Print Report | User Guide

Food Item	Delete this item?	Serving Sizes (g/ml)	Energy (kcal)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Total Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Dietary Fibre (g)	Sugars (g)	Food Rec
<b>Breakfast</b>											
Breakfast Sub-total	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	Breakfast Sub
<b>Morning Snack</b>											
Morning Snack Sub-total	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	Morning Snack S
<b>Lunch</b>											
Lunch Sub-total	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	Lunch Sub-t
<b>Afternoon Snack</b>											
Afternoon Snack Sub-total	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	Afternoon Snack
<b>Dinner</b>											
Dinner Sub-total	-	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	Dinner Sub-t
<b>Other Occasions</b>											



*Food scientist from the CFS, together with consultant in community medicine, demonstrated how to use the online “Food Nutrient Calculator” at a press conference*

## Chapter 9 Building Networks with Mainland and Overseas Partners

-  Food Safety Authority in a Globalized World
-  Towards Closer Relationships with National and International Partners
-  Collaboration at the Global Level
-  Creating Platforms for International Exchanges

### ***FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY IN A GLOBALISED WORLD***

As in many other aspects in life, the issue of food safety is in no way free from the forces of globalisation, and across the world, food agencies, the food trade and the public alike are facing unprecedented changes in the food safety environment. Resolution of many food safety issues call for cross-border collaborations of different authorities. Moreover, food continues to be a major international trade issue, and Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are bound by certain WTO agreements in their food trade with other Members.

The CFS recognizes that global linkages are vital to any effective food safety regulators to enhance its capacity to identify and respond to hazards and food incidents, that may have implications on local public health. The CFS has been working closely with international authorities, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health, and various national agencies overseas and in the Mainland. These linkages are essential for the CFS to have prompt access to latest information and technology worldwide, and for collaboration and coordination.

### ***TOWARDS CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS***

Given the market share taken up by imported food, most of the food incidents taking place in Hong Kong concern food from outside the territory and food incidents overseas may well have implications on local public health. To secure prompt access to updates and to build up its

capacity to respond swiftly, the CFS has been putting in place various mechanisms to promote cooperation with food authorities in the Mainland and overseas:

- Establish notification arrangements, e.g. with Mainland food safety authorities, alert system with Food and Drugs Administration of the USA, the Rapid Alert System with the European Union



*Mrs Carrie Yau, Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Food and Environmental Hygiene) led the delegation of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government to sign a cooperation agreement with the Guangdong Food and Drug Administration in 2006*

- Conduct briefings and meetings with consular corps of major food supplying countries
- Institutionalize meetings and forums of exchange with Mainland authorities, e.g. annual meeting with provincial food safety authorities

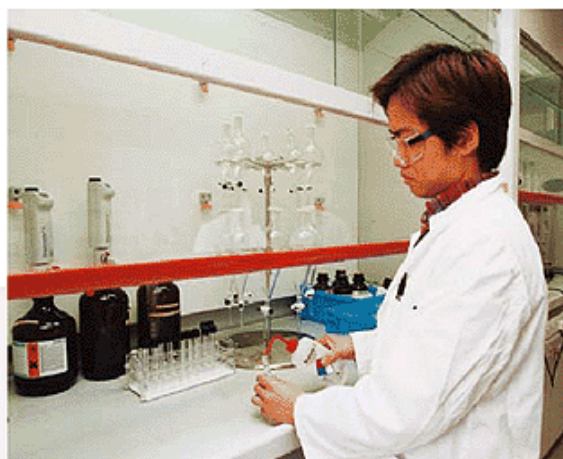


*The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government holding annual meeting with food safety officials from Guangdong, Macao, Shenzhen and Zhuhai*

## COLLABORATION AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, set up jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the WHO of the United Nations, is the single most important standard-setting body in the international food safety arena, for protecting health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in the food trade. In settling food trade disputes, the WTO makes reference to standards set by the Codex Alimentarius Commission on food safety, to ensure that food safety standards have not been used unjustifiably as trade barriers. The CFS highly values its linkages with these major international food safety authorities, and has been engaging actively in collaborative initiatives at the global level:

- Facilitation of global exchanges of food safety information through the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) established by the WHO
- Contribution of research data unique to our region to the WHO's Global Environmental Monitoring System – Food Contamination Monitoring and Assessment Programme (GEMS/Food) network, e.g. Acrylamide in our local food



*Chemists from the Food Research Laboratory of the CFS has been collaborating with the WHO to research on chemical contaminants in food*

- Active participation in committees and meetings of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and international training programmes



## CREATING PLATFORMS FOR INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES

In order to establish itself as an active partner in the international food safety arena, the CFS has been proactively establishing channels for experts from around the world to meet and foster linkages in Hong Kong:

- Engage experts from the Mainland, Australia and Singapore as members of the Expert Committee on Food Safety
- Create opportunities for local and overseas regulators to share their perspectives by inviting overseas experts to conduct training and seminars in Hong Kong, e.g. annual workshop on veterinary public health



*Professional communicators from the New South Wales Food Authority invited to share with CFS staff their experience and expertise in communicating food safety issues*

*International expert in veterinary public health speaking at the CFS' annual workshop*



- Brought together distinguished experts and regulators around the world at the International Symposium on Food Safety, held in Hong Kong in early 2007, to foster international exchanges



*International food safety experts provided local audience with global perspectives on food safety issues at the International Symposium on Food Safety held in Hong Kong in January 2007. Professor Kwan Hoi-shan, Chairman of the Expert Committee on Food Safety, chairing a panel discussion*



*Mr Eddy Chan, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene, thanking Dr Claude Mosha, the Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, for his support to the Symposium*



*Dr SP Mak, Controller of the Centre for Food Safety, addressing the audience at the Symposium*

## Chapter 10 From Vision to Reality

- ✿ Manpower and Structure
- ✿ New Food Safety Ordinance
- ✿ Food Trade Facilitation Office
- ✿ Border Control Points
- ✿ Food Safety Testing Laboratory
- ✿ Information Alert System
- ✿ The Future

From farm audits to exchanges with the trade and the consumers, the CFS has since its establishment in May 2006 been building up important components along the food chain to promote food safety standard in Hong Kong through active tripartite collaboration between the Government, the food trade and the consumers.

### *Control at Source and Legislative Regulatory Framework*

Beginning at the source, the CFS has been enhancing its farm audit work and its partnership with relevant authorities of our major food suppliers, in particular those of the Mainland. In addition to the existing legislative import controls, the CFS has put in place a voluntary enrolment scheme for egg importers and various administrative measures. The latter include registered farms system and inspection of health documents for controlling vegetables, eggs and freshwater fish from the Mainland. To realize a new approach in handling food safety issues, high priority has been set to urgently bring about a fundamental change in the legislative regime, to put in place an effective food tracing system and to facilitate the building up of a responsible and accountable food industry. Apart from an overhaul of the food regulatory regime, continuous reviews of existing food standards are taking place to ensure that they are able to deal with the rapidly changing environment. The capacity of the CFS to scientifically assess food risks in setting food standards and managing food incidents is going to improve significantly with the completion of the first population-based Food Consumption Survey and the Total Diet Studies.

### *Food Surveillance and Food Incidents*

Under our revised food surveillance strategy, our sampling goals have shifted from being quantity-focused to being more proactive and client-oriented. With a food tracing system in place, the improved food surveillance strategy will become even more effective, for the CFS will be able to take quick and appropriate action with regard to the implicated food, and to manage the problem at source. Food incidents have been catching major public attention and the CFS has been refining its response plan, including its communications with the trade and the public. Precautionary principle has been adopted and public announcements are made when initial assessment reveals possible health risk. The proposed legislation-backed tracing system and the power of ordering food recall will also provide more options for effective management of food incidents.

### *Communication and Collaboration*

Food safety as a joint responsibility of the Government, the food trade and the consumers is now a concept recognized by food safety agencies and experts worldwide. The CFS has been building up a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship among all stakeholders through regular exchanges and collaborations. The CFS values very highly its communications and partnerships with all stakeholders, including the public, the trade, the media, and relevant measures have been adopted, including the setting up of the Consumer Liaison Group and the Trade Consultation Forum, for trust and confidence building. As a food safety authority in a globalized world, the CFS has also been cultivating extensive international network, for cooperation opportunities and for prompt access to international updates.

### **MANPOWER AND STRUCTURE**

With the range of initiatives that the CFS has been pursuing to fulfil its mission of promoting food safety, corresponding upgrading of its human resources is essential. The CFS started with some 400 staff and the manpower and structure of the CFS is under constant review to ensure that they are appropriate for the stated goals, mission and key

tasks to which the CFS is committed. The CFS must also remain fully equipped to meet its objectives and to fulfil the organisational values it represents. Furthermore, the CFS must not only address existing operational tasks but must face an important development task in the years to come and as food safety problems evolve and emerge.

With this in mind, the CFS has been recruiting new staff to undertake work as varied as strengthening import control, enhancing food animal disease surveillance, and increasing farm and processing plant inspection. Its multi-disciplinary team consists of public health physicians and nurses, veterinarians, food chemists, food scientists and other food experts such as nutritionists, food biotechnologists, food toxicologists, as well as health inspectorate grade officers. Such cross-disciplinary team is essential and references are made to other food safety authorities to ensure that appropriate expert advice is available. Our plan is to build up a 540-man strong team by the first quarter of 2008. Furthermore, to cope with further increase of work in food safety, the Government will also critically review the redeployment opportunities of resources and, if need be, proceed to solicit additional headcounts and resources for food safety related departments.

However, recruitment of more staff is not an end in itself, but represents just one means to achieve our objectives. Accordingly, the CFS will consider the following objectives in further developing its structure and using its resources:

- Formulation of foreseeable and long-term strategies and goals for the CFS;
- Implementation of measures to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, i.e. “smarter management and enforcement”, utilising the latest technology to allow us to achieve more with less; and
- Constant reviews of the CFS structure to better direct available resources.

To further realize our objectives and goals, the Administration has started a number of major projects in recent months.



## ***DEVELOPING NEW FOOD SAFETY ORDINANCE***

In order to address the deficiencies of the existing regulatory framework, the Administration has begun work on a new legislation to be called the Food Safety Ordinance (FSO). The FSO aims at guaranteeing the supply of safe food in Hong Kong, empowering the CFS to prohibit the sale of unsafe food on the market, and ensuring that effective and efficient systems are in place to monitor, identify, assess and respond to food safety problems for the protection of public health. The FSO also aims at enhance food traceability and placing the responsibility of the supply of safe food back onto the food traders.

As part of the FSO, we also intend to impose a new requirement mandating that all food importers and distributors register with the CFS. The experience of recent food safety incidents has shown that the supply of food can often go through different layers of distributors and unless all those involved in the food distribution chain are identified in advance by the CFS, its effectiveness in tracing and containing the spread of problem food in a food safety incident is hampered.

Going hand in hand with the food importer and distributor registration will be the implementation of a food import permit system for high-risk foods. The import permit system is already in place for meat, poultry and game imports, and legislation will be in place very soon for egg imports. We intend to expand the scope of the permit system to cover other relatively high risk food products such as seafood and other aquatic products, vegetables and fruit. With a comprehensive registration and permit system, we hope to be able to respond quickly, efficiently and proactively to incidents where, for example, food is found to contain prohibited substances or excessive permitted substances, or where food is labelled incorrectly and even when the CFS receives information from international news agencies or food safety authorities regarding unsafe food so that food can be recalled before it reaches the consumer and marketplace, and further import is not permitted.

## ***FOOD TRADE FACILITATION OFFICE***

To facilitate traders following the implementation of the import permit system and importers' registration scheme, the CFS is exploring the establishment of a Food Trade Facilitation Office. This set-up aims to facilitate the trade in understanding and complying with the proposed new requirements. The possibility of providing other trade facilities, e.g. licence applications, at the same location is also being explored.

## ***UPGRADING BORDER CONTROL POINTS***

Our border control points are important "gatekeepers" in the regulation, monitoring and surveillance of imported food. Presently, vehicles carrying food may enter Hong Kong from the Mainland via Man Kam To (MKT), Lok Ma Chau (LMC) or Sha Tau Kok (STK). Live food animals and other fresh foods like vegetables, live fish, meat, poultry and eggs are restricted to the MKT border control point. Due to the relative lack of vehicle holding areas at the MKT crossing, the CFS is actively planning to upgrade the facilities at the MKT.

## ***DEDICATED FOOD SAFETY TESTING LABORATORY***

Investment in laboratory facilities, instrumentation, technology and above all laboratory personnel is paramount in increasing productivity, efficiency and enhancing the CFS' commitments to the consumer. Food samples collected by the CFS are tested in various laboratories, including the CFS' Man Kam To Food Laboratory which assesses the chemical safety of fresh produce (mainly vegetables and raw milk) imported from the Mainland, the Government Laboratory conducts chemical testing on various types of food samples, the Public Health Laboratory Centre of the Department of Health for microbiological testing, and various other laboratories (See diagram in Chapter 5).

To strengthen the capacity of the Government Laboratory in testing of food samples, a new Food Safety Testing Laboratory (FSTL) will be established under the auspices of the Government Laboratory in 2007. Works on this new laboratory began in March 2007 and the expected commissioning date is late 2007. The new FSTL will perform

a wide range of chemical analyses of food products in order to support and respond to samples generated from the food surveillance programme and food complaints. We envisage that the testing capacity and efficiency of the new FSTL for routine surveillance and food complaint will be enhanced. With the additional resources, the Government Laboratory will help to manage food safety problems by providing standard development and testing services to widen the scope of food monitoring as well as urgent testing services for topical food safety issues and incidents.

### ***ENHANCED INFORMATION ALERT SYSTEM***

The CFS is constantly looking into means to perfect its information dissemination system. This is particularly important in the event of food incidents or crises. Building upon the existing electronic information delivery platform, the CFS is planning to launch an enhanced alert system for prompt delivery of relevant information. Food traders and other interested parties will be invited to subscribe to the new system for receiving different types of food safety information such as food recalls, food risk assessment reports and food surveillance programme results.

### ***THE FUTURE***

To cope with the increasing amount of work, the CFS has been strengthening its manpower and critically reviewing any opportunity for redeployment of resources. In the years to come, on-going reviews of the manpower and structure is necessary to allow the CFS to adapt to changing circumstances and to implement new developments. Any new developments will be integrated seamlessly into our day-to-day working practices while the knowledge gained in our regular work will be utilized in coming up with innovative ideas. Building on its foundation and experience gained from its first year, the CFS will continue to grow and improve, to live up to the expectations of the community and to better serve the people of Hong Kong.