

For discussion
on 11 March 2008

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Code of Practice for Pig Farming

INTRODUCTION

The Administration plans to introduce the Code of Practice for Pig Farming (COP) to licensed local pig farms to enhance their management and hygiene standards. This paper aims to update members about the current progress.

BACKGROUND

2. Following the rapid urbanisation of the New Territories, there are increasing concerns about environmental pollution associated with pig farms. The emergence of Japanese encephalitis in recent years, which is endemic among pigs, has also drawn public attention to the management and hygiene of local pig farms.

3. In view of the above, the Government has introduced in mid-2006 a voluntary surrender scheme for pig farms to encourage pig farmers to cease their operation. Simultaneously, we made it clear then that we would tighten the regulation of remaining pig farms to reduce public health risk and rural environmental pollution brought about by the pig farming industry. This Panel has also noted the proposal at the meeting held on 11 April 2006. Accordingly, we plan to amend the licensing condition under the livestock keeping licence to introduce a new COP for pig farms. The COP aims at enhancing management efficiency of pig farms and reducing the risk of disease outbreaks, so as to ensure a more stable supply of fresh pork with better quality assurance. The health of farm workers and people on farm can also be better safeguarded.

THE COP

4. The COP covers four main areas, namely husbandry and farm management; movement control; disease monitoring and control; and, waste treatment and hygiene. After consulting the industry, we have formulated relevant requirements for licensees to follow.

5. On husbandry and farm management, the COP provides that different facilities in the farm should have visible demarcations, while proper records must be kept for the production, keeping and sale of pigs, and the use and storage of veterinary drugs. The COP also bans the use or keeping of prohibited veterinary drugs and chemicals, as well as illegal slaughtering of pigs and unauthorized disposal of pig carcasses.

6. As regards movement control, the COP requires pig farms to have a controlled entrance provided with showering and washing facilities. Any person entering a pig farm shall wear disinfected footwear or shoe-covers. In addition, visit records in respect of all tradespersons and visitors must be kept. Visitors should be prevented from entering the production areas, and livestock from unapproved sources should not be introduced into the farm. These requirements aim at ensuring that proper biosecurity measures are in place to prevent the spread of diseases.

7. With respect to disease monitoring and control, the COP requires the licensee to keep records of sick pigs that show clinical signs or abnormalities; farm workers to wear protective work-clothing; disinfectant facilities to be provided at farm entrance and entrances/exits of each farm structure; quarantine and isolation facilities to be set up on farm; licensee to keep proper records on clinical history, treatment and vaccination of pigs and report outbreaks of notifiable diseases and abnormal mortality rates. Furthermore, no other livestock or animals may be kept inside the farm, and unauthorised disposal of pig carcasses is prohibited.

8. Regarding waste treatment and hygiene, the COP requires that liquid waste generated from the farm must be treated by approved livestock waste treatment system to reach the statutory standards before discharge; the discharge of waste cannot bypass the waste treatment system, sampling points or the discharge outlet; the waste treatment system, including the discharge outlets, cannot be altered without authorization; all drains/ditches/trenches/discharge outlets shall be

built as fixed structures; and dilution of treated liquid waste to achieve compliance with the discharge standards is prohibited. Solid waste must also be disposed properly.

9. The COP also provides for a set of penalty. If the licensee fails to comply with the COP, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will, depending on the number and nature of the breaches and the degree of threats to public health and environmental hygiene, take actions accordingly (see **Annex** for details). Nevertheless, AFCD staff will definitely closely liaise with the pig farmers concerned to provide ample opportunities for explanation before imposing the penalty. All cases will also be dealt with fairly and impartially.

CONSULTATION

10. AFCD has started drawing up the COP since last year. Throughout the process, it has maintained liaison with the trade, held meetings with representatives, and organised workshops to discuss the COP in details with farmers. AFCD staff have also visited individual pig farms to consult farmers on the proposed COP. We have made appropriate amendments to the draft COP and corresponding measures as far as practicable, after taking into account the views and opinions collected, and with a view to striking a balance between protecting environmental hygiene/public health and addressing the actual operational need of the industry.

11. The draft COP was presented to the Livestock Sub-committee under the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries for discussion on 23 March 2007, 3 January and 28 February 2008 respectively. The concerns expressed by members were similar to that of the industry. The sub-committee has also made a report on 4 February 2008 to the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries, which did not have any other comments.

CONCERNS OF THE TRADE

12. The trade has expressed concern over the possible penalties for contravention of the COP (including revocation of licences in serious cases). The AFCD has explained to pig farmers that although existing legislation has already empowered the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation to revoke

licences of those farmers who have violated the relevant provisions, the Government has never acted hastily. The power will only be exercised after adequate notification and warnings are given, and the farmers concerned will have the right to make representations. According to the revised COP, only a few breaches posing serious threats to the environment or public health carry the penalty of licence revocation. The relevant requirements are primarily aimed at preventing discharge of untreated liquid waste from farms, unauthorized alteration of drain pipes, illegal slaughtering, improper disposal of pig carcasses and use of prohibited chemicals.

13. We also understand that individual pig farmers may need time to adapt themselves to the COP owing to the special circumstances of their farms. The AFCD will give not less than 3 months of advance notice before the implementation of the COP for farmers to adopt the new requirements. Visits will also be paid to pig farmers in the first 12 months to give them advice and guidance to resolve the problems arising from the COP. On discovering irregularities on inspections, the AFCD will take the circumstances into consideration and provide farmers ample opportunities to make improvements. Some farmers are also concerned that they may violate the COP unknowingly, resulting in their licences being affected. In this connection, the AFCD will continue to maintain close liaison with pig farmers and explain the COP to them in details. In addition, the AFCD will consider further refining the provisions in the COP to address the above concern of the pig farmers.

SIMILAR CODES IN PRACTICE

14. Licensees of local poultry farms have been observing the “Biosecurity Requirements” stipulated in their licenses for several years, the requirements of which are similar to that of COP. In the Mainland, provincial and municipal governments have, in accordance with the “Livestock Husbandry Law of the People’s Republic of China” promulgated similar statutes such as “The Management of Livestock Husbandry in Shanghai City”, “The Management of Livestock Husbandry in Tianjin City”, etc for Mainland pig farms to follow.

WAY FORWARD

15. In order to improve the condition of local pig farms, we will continue to liaise with the pig farming industry and listen to their views. We plan to finalize the COP and relevant measures before the end of the year, with a view to putting them into implementation.

Food and Health Bureau

Environment Bureau

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

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Contraventions and Relevant Measures

Grade	Degree of Threats to Public Health and Rural Environment	Penalty
1	Breaches causing minor threat, for example - failure to keep records of pig production.	Those who commit a first offence within the licence period will be issued a written warning. If the first offender fails to make satisfactory rectification within a month or commits repeated offences in respect of the same item(s) or contravenes any other requirement(s) of the same grade, the AFCD may reduce up to 25% of the licensed rearing capacity depending on the accumulated total number and nature of breaches committed. The original licensed rearing capacity may be restored only when all breaches have been duly rectified.
2	Breaches causing medium threat, for example - failure to apply the appropriate withdrawal period as recommended by manufacturers after using chemicals on pigs and failure to report outbreak of disease (e.g. foot and mouth disease, swine fever) in the farm to AFCD within 24 hours.	Those who commit a first offence within the licence period will be issued a written warning. If the first offender fails to make satisfactory rectification within a month or commits repeated offences in respect of the same item(s) or contravenes any other requirement(s) of the same grade, the AFCD may reduce up to 50% of the licensed rearing capacity depending on the accumulated total number and nature of breaches committed. The original licensed rearing capacity may be restored only when all breaches have been duly rectified.
3	Breaches causing serious threat, for example - using prohibited drugs, slaughtering pigs on farm for human consumption and improper treatment of liquid waste.	The offender may be subjected to license revocation or rejection of licence renewal if no reasonable excuse is given.