

Proposed research outline

Food safety mechanism and food labelling requirements in the European Union, the United Kingdom and France

1. Background

1.1 At the meeting on 10 July 2007, the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (Panel) requested the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) to conduct a research on the food safety mechanism and food labelling requirements in selected places in Europe. The Panel, in particular, is interested in studying the policy, regulatory framework and consumer protection in relation to food safety in the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK) and France. The Panel also wishes to look into the food labelling requirements in the UK and France.

2. Places to be studied

2.1 In the EU, the integrated approach to food safety aims to promote a high level of food safety, animal health, animal welfare and plant health within the EU through coherent "from farm to fork" measures and adequate monitoring, while ensuring the effective functioning of individual member states. In 2000, the European Commission adopted a *White Paper on Food Safety*, setting out a plan for legislative reform on food safety and the establishment of an European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The new food safety legislation covers all aspects of the food chain, including the primary production, processing, transport, distribution, sale and supply of food and feed.

2.2 In the UK, the production, processing, distribution, retail, packaging and labelling of food products are governed by laws, regulations, codes of practice and guidelines. While the *Food Safety Act 1990* provides the framework for all food legislation, the *General Food Regulations 2004* lay down the penalties for breaching the food law. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent government department set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect public health as well as consumer interests in relation to food products. FSA oversees the whole food industry, from farming, food production and distribution, to retail and catering. It addresses food safety issues at every stage of the food chain, providing information and guidance on related best practice and legal requirements.

2.3 France is the third largest exporter of agricultural products and processed food in the world. In France, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, are jointly responsible for food safety policies and their implementation through the development of regulations, inspections, improvement of the surveillance system and enhancement of analytical tools. Meanwhile, the French Food Safety Agency, established in 1999, is responsible for risk assessment in relation to food products based on a scientific approach. Food producers, processors and distributors are obliged to comply with the European directives in relation to food safety. An alert mechanism at both the national and EU levels is also in place to monitor both potential and known risks in the food chain.

3. Research outline

3.1 RLSD proposes the following outline for the study:

Part 1 — Introduction

Part 2 — The European Union

Part 3 — The United Kingdom

Part 4 — France

Part 5 — Summary of findings

3.2 Parts 2 to 4 discuss the latest development in the food safety mechanism in the EU, the UK and France in terms of the following aspects:

- (a) regulatory framework;
- (b) responsible authorities;
- (c) food safety policies;
- (d) food labelling requirements;
- (e) consumer protection;
- (f) enforcement tools; and
- (g) implementation concerns.

4. Completion date

4.1 RLSD proposes to complete the research report by January 2008.

Research and Library Services Division
Legislative Council Secretariat