

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 25 March 2009**

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| Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene |
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Madam Chairman and Honorable Members,

The Food and Health Bureau is committed to ensuring food safety and environmental hygiene with a view to promoting public health and improving people's quality of life. In the Estimates, about \$5 billion has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food and Environmental Hygiene" for 2009-10, representing an increase of nearly \$360 million over the previous year. The additional provision is mainly intended for enhancing food safety, improving environmental hygiene and promoting the development of food testing services in Hong Kong.

2. Now I will proceed to highlight our priority tasks in the coming year.

Food Safety

3. We are working on a comprehensive Food Safety Bill to strengthen food safety protection. As you all know, we have already gone ahead with the legislation for the recall of problem food. The scrutiny of the food recall legislation is near completion and I hope it can be enacted as soon as possible.

4. We are dealing with the remaining work, including a mandatory registration scheme for food importers and distributors, requirement for food traders to maintain proper records on the movement of food so as to enhance traceability, as well as tightened import control on specific food items.

5. Earlier on, we have carried out extensive public consultation on these initiatives and they were generally supported by the public and the trade. However, we also note that different food trades indeed have their specific needs and trade practices. To assess in detail the implications involved, we have appointed a consultant to conduct a Business Impact Assessment on the Food Safety Bill. We will brief the LegCo Panel on the results of the assessment after it has been completed. We will be able to introduce the Bill in the first half of the next legislative session.

6. Meanwhile, the Centre for Food Safety will continue to take food samples for testing at the import, wholesale and retail levels to ensure food safety. In 2008, the Centre for Food Safety took a total of 66 400 food samples for testing, with an overall satisfactory rate of 99.6%. These included 17 751 fresh vegetable samples tested for pesticide residues and the satisfactory rate was 99.9%.

7. Besides, the Financial Secretary has indicated in his Budget speech that we are taking measures to support the development of food testing services so as to develop Hong Kong into a food testing hub in the region.

8. These measures are taken because we note that an increasing number of food importers and suppliers have engaged private laboratories to conduct testing of their foods before putting them on market shelves. We strongly encourage and support such action as it helps to strengthen food safety.

9. To support and promote this development, the Innovation and Technology Commission will provide private laboratories with better and more efficient accreditation services. The Government Laboratory will also outsource more of its regular food surveillance testing work. This will strengthen food safety and provide more business and job opportunities for private laboratories. In turn, the Government Laboratory will have a better focus on developing new testing methods and tackling more complicated and emergency food incidents.

Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza

10. On the prevention and control of avian influenza, various Government departments remain highly vigilant. In the wake of the two outbreaks of avian influenza among chickens last year, the Administration has promptly imposed the ban on overnight stocking of live poultry at the retail level and introduced the buyout scheme for live poultry trade, which helped reduce the number of poultry farmers by over 40% and the number of wholesalers and retailers by about 70%, thus significantly minimizing human contact with chickens. Following a recent outbreak of avian influenza in a local chicken farm, we have also required all chicken farms to further enhance their biosecurity measures. At the same time, we will continue to maintain close liaison with relevant Mainland authorities for effective prevention and control of the disease on all fronts.

11. It is the Government's policy to implement central slaughtering as early as practicable in order to achieve complete segregation of humans from live poultry. We are pressing ahead with the preparatory work concerned, including the statutory processes such as the Environmental Impact Assessment, land use rezoning etc. The poultry slaughtering centre is expected to come into operation in 2011-12. To this end, we plan to submit the relevant legislation in the first half of the next legislative session.

12. Madam Chairman, my colleagues and I are happy to answer questions from Members.