

Subcommittee on Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation

**Follow-up on Matters arising from the Subcommittee Meeting
on 4 June 2012**

Purpose

This paper sets out the Administration's response to enquiries made by Members at the Subcommittee meeting on 4 June 2012.

Testing services for pesticide residues provided by the Vegetable Marketing Organization

2. The Vegetable Marketing Organization ("VMO") is a non-profit making organisation, providing trading facilities, pesticide residue testing and accounting services to vegetable wholesalers and buyers. It obtains its operational funding by collecting commission from the transaction value of vegetables wholesaled thereat. Apart from vegetable wholesale, VMO has set up a pesticide residue testing laboratory to ensure that vegetables marketed through it are wholesome and safe. On average, around 220 to 250 vegetable samples, including vegetables locally produced and those imported from the Mainland, are handled by the laboratory daily. The testing cost is fully borne by VMO with no extra charge on vegetable wholesalers. According to information provided by VMO, the total cost of pesticide residue testing from April 2011 to March 2012 was around \$2.3 million.

3. If any test result shows the presence of residues of highly toxic pesticides or excessive level of pesticide residues, VMO will immediately advise the wholesaler concerned to stop selling the vegetable in question and issue a warning letter reminding the wholesaler that the supplying farm must adhere to the principle of safe and proper use of pesticides in vegetable production. VMO will refer suspected cases to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for follow up actions and step up monitoring and testing of vegetables of the wholesaler concerned.

The process of formulating maximum residue limits (“MRLs”) / extraneous maximum residue limits (“EMRLs”) in Schedule 1 to the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation

4. The Administration has provided a detailed account of how the list of MRLs / EMRLs in Schedule 1 to the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (“the Regulation”) was formulated in the paper issued to Members in end-May (LC Paper No. CB(2)2202/11-12(01)) as well as at the meeting of the Subcommittee held on 4 June 2012. In response to enquiries from Members, we would like to supplement the following points –

- (a) the Administration received around 1 000 suggestions on pesticide residue limits during public consultation. Among them, around 600 suggested limits were not accepted mainly due to technical reasons such as the pesticide residue definition being different from the relevant residue definition adopted in Schedule 1, or because the proposed limit could not pass risk assessment; and
- (b) the formulation of the list of MRLs/EMRLs in Schedule 1 to the Regulation is based primarily on the available standards recommended by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, supplemented by standards of the Mainland and other major food exporting countries to Hong Kong (including the United States and Thailand), while taking into account comments received during public consultation. The Centre for Food Safety (“CFS”) has scrutinised these standards by conducting risk assessment to ensure that the proposed standards are adequate to protect public health in Hong Kong. The scope of risk assessment includes acute and chronic toxicity, carcinogenicity, reproductive and developmental toxicity, i.e. short-term and long-term assessment of dietary exposure to pesticide residues. Chronic toxicological assessment includes life-time dietary exposure to pesticide residues from childhood to old age. Regarding the concern of an organisation that certain MRLs in Schedule 1 to the Regulation are more lenient than relevant limits in other places (such as the European Union), we wish to point out that the degree of degrading of the same pesticide could vary to a large extent in different places and under different climates. Different supplying countries would, taking into account the types of crops and the corresponding pest problems and the practical situations in

their countries, formulate different pesticide residue limits following good agricultural practices and approve the use of registered pesticides. The standards of the European Union are formulated based on its own agricultural situation and may not be applicable to situations in other places.

Testing results of pesticide residues in vegetable samples by the Greenpeace

5. The Administration noted the public statements made by the Greenpeace in May this year about the testing results of pesticide residues in vegetable samples collected from three local supermarkets between February and March this year. CFS has studied the testing results provided by the Greenpeace in detail. As CFS does not have the vegetable samples tested by the Greenpeace for verification, CFS could only analyse the data provided by the Greenpeace which could not be used as evidence for enforcement actions. According to information provided by the Greenpeace, some samples may contravene the standards stipulated in the Regulation or pose long-term health risks. Accordingly, CFS has worked with retailers concerned and the Mainland authorities to trace the sources and collect follow-up samples from relevant retailers for testing. All follow-up samples collected are satisfactory. CFS has reminded the retailers concerned of the safety of food products sold and the requirements under the Regulation that would come into force in future. In addition, CFS is arranging with the Mainland authorities to inspect the relevant registered vegetable farms for exportation to Hong Kong.

6. Collecting food samples for testing of pesticide residues is part of the regular Food Surveillance Programme of CFS. Under the risk-based Food Surveillance Programme, samples at import, wholesale and retail levels will be taken for chemical (including pesticide residues) and microbiological testing to ensure that all food comply with local legislative requirements and are fit for human consumption. At present, CFS announces all food surveillance results, including the types of unsatisfactory food samples and testing results, via monthly press releases and food safety reports published on its website. CFS will also offer relevant food safety information and advice to consumers. In addition, if the testing results show that the food may pose immediate threat to human health, CFS will immediately issue press release to remind the general public not to consume such types of food, so as to minimise public health risks.

Advice Sought

7. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau
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