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**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Information note prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 28 May 2013**

**Supply of live cattle in Hong Kong**

There is no restriction on the origin of livestock supplied to Hong Kong. Provided that the hygiene and quarantine requirements are met, import of livestock from any place is allowed into Hong Kong. At present, all live cattle are imported into Hong Kong from the Mainland through Ng Fung Hong Limited<sup>1</sup>. According to the Administration, the supply of live cattle was reasonably stable between 2009 and 2011, with the market importing on average 70 to 80 live cattle each day. However, in the second half of 2012, there was a significant increase in the wholesale price of live cattle, leading to a surge in the price of fresh beef. The relevant media reports on the subject are in **Appendix I**.

2. There has been a suggestion of opening up the live cattle wholesale market in order to bring down the price of fresh beef. To better understand the market situation, the Administration has commissioned a consultant to conduct a market survey to compare the price, quality and costs of fresh beef in Hong Kong and nearby Mainland cities. The empirical data collected can

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Commerce ("MOC") under the State Council appoints the main agents for the supply of Mainland livestock to Hong Kong. Prior to October 2007, Ng Fung Hong Limited was appointed as the sole agent supplying Mainland live pigs and live cattle to Hong Kong. Subsequent to the agreement between the Food and Health Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and MOC on opening up the market for supplying live pigs to Hong Kong in October 2007, the number of agents for supplying Mainland live pigs to Hong Kong has increased from one to three. Ng Fung Hong Limited is currently the sole agent for importing Mainland live cattle into Hong Kong.

thus provide an objective basis for the Administration to analyze issues related to the market. According to the Administration, the market survey has just been completed. The Administration will release the findings and decide the way forward for the live cattle wholesale market by the end of 2013.

3. A question in relation to the supply and price of fresh beef was raised at the Council meeting of 9 January 2013. The question and the Administration's reply are in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
22 May 2013

## 欄商指五豐行頻加價經營困難 牛肉檔農曆年後爆結業潮

五豐行半年內六度提高活牛價格，在「貨貴客少」現實下，全港牛肉檔經營困難。全港新鮮牛肉肉商發言人許偉堅稱，牛肉若繼續加價，不排除會發起罷市。他預計農曆年後，約四分一牛肉檔，即100間因經營困難結業。業界代表昨日聯同立法會議員王國興簽署公開信，促請港區人大向中央提出檢討活牛供港政策，開放活牛供應市場。

本報記者林丹媛

五豐行回應查詢時指，供港活牛的採購及批發價的升降始終受內地行情自然波動的影響，並非是由五豐行獨家經營造成。面對貨源緊張，價格上漲，他們也倍增壓力，亦為此付出了艱辛的努力。五豐行表示將繼續堅持市場化運作，並對牛肉市場開放與否持開放態度，不會抵制。

單以去年下半年計，五豐行活牛批發價十二月比六月升幅超過4成。王國興表示，香港進口內地活牛價格被壟斷原因，是因國家商業部與特區政府協定由五豐行獨家代理活牛進口，雖現時香港其他公司，如廣南行、香港農業專區，也有代理少量活牛入口，卻需交由五豐行定價，及抽取佣金，形成壟斷，並造成五豐行一家獨大，操控活牛價格。

業界盼人大提檢討機制

業界代表去年十一月曾向食物及衛生局局長高永文反映情況，但王國興說，會面結果是「急驚風遇着慢郎中」。王國興認為，高永文雖表示會找獨立機構，調查五豐行是否有壟斷及加幅過高，但需時幾個月才有結果。他希望三十六位港區人大代表，三月到北京開會時，向中央政府反映業界及市民訴求，開放更多供港活牛進口商。

全港新鮮牛肉肉商發言人許偉堅表示，五豐行去年半年六次加價，「貨貴客少」，使牛肉成為奢侈品，令業界經營困難。他預計，農曆年後，全港500間牛肉檔，超過100間面臨結業危機。

許偉堅表示，五豐行以貨源不足操控牛肉批發價，與香港一河之隔的深圳，與本港新鮮牛肉食品價格有相當大差異。他稱，因兩地政策不同，香港人工、租金、過關時檢驗費用等較高，若批發價比深圳高1至2成可以接受，但香港與深圳牛肉零售價相差4成，而批發價則差達5成。

他續說，五豐行早前表示毛利率低完全不可信。他說，五豐行每100斤牛成本價約3050元，批發價為4100元，利潤是1050元，以每頭牛重600斤計，五豐行每頭牛賺6300元，若五豐行每日批發60頭牛，一個月可賺1200萬元。

促開放市場增活牛供應商

許偉堅強調，政府開放活牛供應市場，並非為了調低牛肉價格，而是希望牛肉價格能跟着市場走勢定價，「有升有跌」，增加零售商議價能力。他又建議，政府以活牛進口代理的表現，作為續約條件，以起監察作用。

經營牛肉檔的曹先生表示，去年十二月五豐行加價後，生意急降5成，客量也少了1至2成，以前檔口也有5到6名員工，其中兩名是散工，但在「貨貴客少」下，為了開源節流，也不再聘用散工。他預計五豐行今年會再調高批發價，希望政府盡快開放市場，增加活牛供應商。

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## 尋內地農場運輸活牛 業界望政府開放市場

【明報專訊】牛肉及豬肉價格持續上升，活牛每擔批發價格調升至4105元，近日活豬拍賣價最高達1830元，見1年新高。食物及衛生局長高永文表示，政府對開放市場存有憂慮，如業界能否應付活牛從內地供港的食品安全要求。有業界人士透露，早於去年10月開始蒐集合適的內地農場資料，以確保香港有源源不斷的活牛供應，最終希望說服政府開放市場。

高永文：須確保食用安全

高永文表示，政府對於開放市場能否令活牛供應保持充足及活牛價格下降存有疑慮，因任何代理商除了要確保供應充足，還要肩負活牛從牧場運送到港都要確保食用安全的責任。

九龍牛羊商會副理事長周德表示，業界去年10月開始蒐集內地牧場資料、活牛運輸、食品安全等資料，並積極聯絡可靠、可長年供應來港活牛的內地農場，希望以此說服政府，除了五豐行，業界都有能力供應活牛到港。

對於高永文憂慮內地可牧牛的草原不多，加上內地經濟發展及需求增加，難以吸引人從事牧養業，周德稱，在內蒙古隨便找一個市都有大草原牧牛，青海牛羊漫山遍野，高永文的憂慮根本不是問題。

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## 五豐行稱每牛賺517元被指報細數

【明報專訊】五豐行去年6次提高活牛批發價，街市牛肉零售價亦升至每斤100元。五豐行昨首次透露活牛批發業務的財政資料，指去年活牛營業額為3.96億元，平均每頭活牛約售1.7萬元，扣除運輸費等成本，每頭約賺517元。該行強調內地活牛需求大，令貨源緊張才被迫加價，但牛肉商質疑其盈利「報細數」，促請當局開放活牛市場。

營業額3.96億每頭平均1.7萬元

去年供港活牛數量為25,983頭，平均每日71頭。五豐行表示，當中23,194頭由其供應，去年營業額為3.96億港元，毛利率6.53%，即逾2500萬港元；若扣除代銷佣金及運輸費，實際毛利僅1200萬元，但仍未扣除人工、倉儲費用及牛隻殘死等損失。換言之，五豐行每頭牛賺約517元。五豐行強調，內地活牛需求增加，令活牛貨源前年開始緊張，加上飼料和人工等成本上升，令牛存欄量不斷減少，扯高牛價，才被迫加價，並強調對開放市場及發展持開放態度。

牛肉商：年中起批發價約1.8萬

五豐行去年每頭活牛平均售1.7萬元，全港新鮮牛肉肉商發言人許偉堅質疑，活牛去年多次加價，一頭500至600司馬斤的活牛，年中至年尾批發價約1.8萬元，至上月達逾2萬元不等。他質疑五豐行盈利「報細數」，促請當局開放活牛市場。他擔心若牛價持續高企，部分牛肉檔生意減少，或於農曆新年後被迫結業。

五豐行回應，去年9至10月活牛貨源緊張，有個別重量超過800司馬斤的超大良種牛供港，按當時批發單價，一頭售價接近甚至超過2.5萬元，但來貨數量很少，港商亦不接受，故售價不具代表性。

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## 牛肉瘋價生意減 檔販憂失業

農曆新年將至，街市檔販都被主婦圍得團團轉，但在深水埗北河街街市賣牛肉的文先生，卻獨守冷清無人的檔口，擔心過年後隨時失業。

文指五豐行過去一年6次加價，現時20元僅可買4兩鮮牛肉，令市民都不買牛肉；加價後生意少了最少4成，故過年也不敢加價。由於已從事這行多年，文慨歎轉型有困難，「到時惟有做門口狗（保安員）」。他希望政府速推措施改變五豐行壟斷。

### 持續虧蝕 內地牛場拒供港

漁護署數字顯示，09至11年每日平均70至80隻活牛入口，但至去年12月入口量減至每日約60隻，近日更縮至45隻。全港新鮮牛肉肉商發言人許偉堅指，因牛肉價格太高及供應愈來愈少，料農曆新年過後約三分一牛肉檔結業。

內地供港牛場的廣東湛江遂溪縣洋青南方生態畜牧養殖場，場主鄭志才表示，上月已申請由本月起停止向港輸出牛隻。

鄭指最近不少廣東牛商都紛紛退牌，拒向港供牛，因廣東賣一斤肥牛有40元人民幣，但賣到香港兌換人民幣，一斤僅31、32元，由於不斷虧蝕，故寧願只做內地生意。

食衛局局長高永文昨稱會緊密監察，並已邀請專家研究市面牛肉供應減少原因；對於是否需推出其他政策，他說持開放態度。五豐行回應，會做好牛肉的保質保量供應。

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## 港研開放「牛市」紓肉價 業界冀破壟斷 春節後恐再加價

新鮮牛肉價如「牛市」狂飆，每斤逾百元「天價」。消息稱，政府研究多時，傾向開放活牛供港代理牌照；但牛肉業界對開放市場意見紛紜，有認為打破壟斷可令牛肉降價，但因內地活牛內銷價高企，就算開放代理也難阻牛肉加價，惟盼現時做獨家代理的五豐行與業界同舟共濟，勿「賺到盡」，這可令港零售牛肉價下降。

記者：李建人 郭增龍

五豐行去年六度增加內地供港活牛批發價，良牛批發價增至每擔（一百斤）四千一百零五元，令街市牛肉檔每斤零售價逾百元，肥牛則加至每擔四千三百一十元，市民往火鍋店吃口新鮮靚肥牛日益奢侈。本報去年十二月作調查報道「牛價飆升之謎」系列專題後，當局經調查牛肉市場問題後，正傾向以開放市場手段解決問題。

傾向增一兩個代理

消息稱，食物及衛生局調查牛肉供應和價格問題，最近與活牛供港代理商、牛肉商會等業界商討後，認為在內地牛肉價格近年持續攀升、內銷價高於供港價下，開放市場雖難令牛肉價格插水式下跌，但增加代理商仍能增加競爭，代理佣金有望下調，對增加活牛供應起正面作用，基於開放市場對市民利多於弊，因此傾向開放多一至兩個代理商。

雖然當局未公布調查結果，但不排除會向國家商務部提出建議，若商務部同意開放，預計會像○七年開放活豬供港代理市場一樣，由競逐代理牌照的公司提交申請書爭奪代理牌照。

據悉，國營企業廣南行也有涉足活牛供港生意，且集中在廣東省地區牛場收購活牛，但收購牛隻後，卻要交五豐行運港銷售。

「變相壟斷」市場的五豐行去年六度加價後，供港活牛數量持續減少，近期更出現「賣剩牛」蕭條情況，顯示「天價」牛肉令市場不斷萎縮，牛肉檔結業潮將繼續惡化。

食衛局局長高永文昨指出，最近發現活牛供應相對穩定，但上水屠房屠宰牛隻數量卻有所減少，相信是牛肉價格上升引致，但加價究竟是因市場被壟斷還是供應緊張造成，要讓政府委託的專家作調查，但他同意內地也有搶購活牛情況，令內地活牛存量近期下降逾三成。

增供應唯靠加收購價

香港新鮮牛肉商發言人許偉堅表示，開放市場可增加市場透明度，而且內地新鮮牛肉零售價目前折合約六十多港元一斤，與本港上百元一斤仍有距離，相信打破壟斷有



助穩定牛肉供應和價格。

不過，有業界認為在活牛內銷價高於供港價下，增加供應關鍵是增加收購價，但本港市場實難以承受，因此就算開放代理牌照，也難增加供應和令牛肉降價。該業界人士又預計，內地活牛供應持續緊張，勢將再推高批發價，預計春節後活牛批發價將再增加，「無錢唯有食凍牛肉！」

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## 高永文倡活牛業界 兩手準備

【本報訊】牛價高企，港牛肉商經營難，港人有機會無活牛食。食衛局局長高永文建議活牛業界做好兩手準備，考慮不同營運模式，重申港府對開放活牛市場持開放態度。

### 考慮不同營運模式

高永文昨於電台接受電話訪問時指，會用盡方法改善本港活牛供應及盡量調低批發價；惟由於香港活牛市場佔內地市場很小的份額，相對內地龐大市場，本港市場即使用盡方法，都未必能改變內地市場的需求模式，建議活牛業界要做好兩手準備。

高稱明白內地活牛供應緊張，或影響本港來貨，亦有說法指是活牛唯一代理五豐行壟斷，造成價格被抬高。高指本地活牛市場的研究報告仍在進行，研究未完成前難下評論，強調政府對開放活牛市場持開放態度，亦要小心決定下一步方向。

早前有消息指，內地牛場因供港牛隻價錢，較直接售給內地市場少兩成，因而令內地牛場供港意慾減少，退出供港市場。內蒙供港牛場之一澳丰公司總經理閔寶山早於去年9月已向記者透露，內地供港牛場已由5年前的17家，至今已餘下4家。

九龍九羊商會理事長周德稱，去年8、9月曾到西安市場，發現當地活牛零售市價每斤30多元人民幣，折合港幣亦只為40多元，本港同期活牛價卻達每斤80元，相距足足一倍。

被問及為何內地牛平價批發供港，到港後高價出售，中間差價誰人佔了？該商會副理事長周平德說他也不理解。他說，現時本港活牛零售價每斤逾百元，折合人民幣亦需80元，質疑內地人均收入水平如何負擔得起昂貴牛價。

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## **Beef market monopoly ‘could be opened up’**

The food and health chief says he remains receptive to opening up the live cattle market, amid the on-going surge in beef prices.

Speaking on the radio, Secretary for Food and Health Dr Ko Wing-man said various factors could have sparked the spike in prices, such as a limited supply of beef in the mainland which has driven up costs across the board.

Ko said consumers may have to consider alternatives to fresh beef, while retailers may need to change their business models if supply remains tight. He noted that Hong Kong accounted for a small share of the mainland’s live cattle market and therefore the city was unlikely to have a great influence on the situation.

“There are different news reports that try to identify the factors behind the soaring price. Therefore, we have to be very cautious when determining our next step,” Ko said.

When asked whether more distributors should be allowed to enter the market, Ko refused to express a personal view.

He said: “We are keeping an open mind on [the option].”

Ko refused to speculate on the impact opening up the market would have on Hong Kong.

The Food and Health Bureau is conducting a study, due to be completed in March, into whether competition in the supply of fresh beef from the mainland would slow soaring prices.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department data put beef consumption in Hong Kong between 2009 and 2011 at about 77 to 79 head of cattle a day.

The city’s sole mainland beef distributor Ng Fung Hong yesterday said it also had an open mind on any market developments.

The firm reported a year-on-year fall of 11 per cent in gross profit on its live cattle imports last year. Ng Fung Hong imported 23,194 head of cattle last year – about 89 per cent of Hong Kong’s total live cattle import. Its turnover was HK\$396 million, with gross profit of about HK\$25 million, compared with a gross profit of HK\$28 million on imports of 25,474 head of cattle in 2011.

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## 肥牛加價4.18% 火鍋店叫苦 販商冀打破五豐行壟斷

獨家代理活牛的五豐行，事隔三個月又調高肥牛批發價，至每擔四千四百九十元，加幅百分之四點一八，主要影響火鍋店，及愛打邊爐的市民，但良種牛未有加價。今次是過去一年內，肥牛第六度加價。牛肉商會表示無奈，指天氣回暖，肥牛需求減少，惟擔心零售價已過百元一斤的鮮牛肉稍後又再加價，促當局盡快開放活牛市場。

記者：吳雋妍 陳浩忻

五豐行昨宣布，肥牛又再加價，由去年十二月起每擔肥牛批發價四千三百一十元，加價一百八十元，至每擔四千四百九十元。五豐行解釋，內地消費需求旺盛，引致活牛行情上漲。對於今次只加肥牛價，而暫時維持良種牛價，五豐行解釋由於品種不一，貨源和需求各異，會按實際情況作出調整，保障香港市場肥牛供應。

### 無奈轉嫁消費者

全港新鮮牛肉商發言人許偉堅對於肥牛加價，表示無奈，但指肥牛只佔五分一市場，主要被食肆預訂，較少牛肉檔有售，認為主要影響火鍋店，但預計每斤肥牛零售價亦要加價約二十元，至每斤約一百八十元；而普通鮮牛肉不會加價。

許強調，現時牛肉加價已達市場無法承受的地步，「每日供港活牛七十隻，但只屠宰約五十隻，因為太貴都無人買，點解來貨仲要加價呢？」

食肆亦叫苦連天，新光酒樓集團董事總經理胡珠指，五豐行獨家代理活牛，要加價亦無辦法，食肆捱不住亦會提價。他說，手切新鮮肥牛可貴至三百元一碟，「除非好喜歡吃新鮮肥牛，否則都吃美國急凍安格斯肥牛算了，價錢差一截。」

餐飲聯業協會會長黃家和稱，早前向食物及衛生局局長高永文反映，要求政府盡快完成開放活牛市場研究，他引述政府內部認為，即使開放至三、四家供應商，但需求或會上升，難保價格一定回落，所以要審慎考慮。他建議政府引入市場投資，在內地東北開設養牛場供港，但對方亦指須研究。

筲箕灣街市吉祥肉食負責人林先生說，現時新鮮肥牛每斤零售價由一百六十至二百多元，批發價再加，無可避免轉嫁消費者，「十年前每日都從買手取整頭牛來賣，近年減少到每周兩次、每次只拿四分一頭。」他期望盡快打破五豐行壟斷局面。百好肉食負責人更指可能索性不賣肥牛，「肥牛批發價直逼五千元一擔，已經沒太多酒樓、火鍋店向我們取貨，這麼貴連散客都不買啦！」

市民關女士說，偶爾才到火鍋店淺嘗肥牛，再加價就不買，「不一定要吃牛肉吧。」黎女士則說，一磅肥牛只是加幾元，會繼續買，「始終新鮮肥牛好吃點。」

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## 中途壞車昨供港活牛少六成

【明報專訊】五豐行獨家供應的活牛上周加價後，昨日供港活牛量又較原訂的大減近六成半。食物及衛生局回應稱，據該局了解，昨本應有50頭供港，但結果只有18頭入口，將向五豐行了解原因。五豐行表示是因運輸途中遇上車輛故障，今日會恢復供應，有牛肉商代表稱，肉販之間已做好協調，相信不會影響牛肉零售市場。

僅18頭料無礙未來兩天零售

鮮肉大聯盟昨公布，昨只得18頭牛供港，恐今日只有三分之一牛肉檔有足夠牛肉開業。不過，九龍牛羊業商會副理事長周德表示，昨日有18頭良種活牛供港，再加上19頭肥牛存貨，今日共有37頭活牛供應，不足平日供應的六成，已與牛肉商協調分配，且大部分牛肉檔尚有存貨，相信不會影響未來兩天的零售市場。據了解，本港活牛批發市場每日平均有40多頭良種牛，以及約20頭肥牛供港。本港活牛獨家代理五豐行回覆查詢時稱，供港活牛突然缺貨是因運輸途中車輛故障所致，今日會回復正常供應，預計會有63頭活牛到港。

五豐行上周五調整肥牛批發價，每擔由去年12月的4310元，加價至4490元，升幅達4.18%，是今年首次調高活牛批發價。五豐行昨未有回應其他牛肉會否加價，只表示會留意國內牛肉市場的發展趨勢。

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## 五豐行活牛或再加價

活牛價格持續高企引起市場多方關注，華潤創業（00291）首席財務官黎汝雄解釋，旗下五豐行每日進口的活牛約40至50條，而活牛業務的毛利率低於10%，並指五豐行加價只是反映內地供應商加價行動。

他續指，五豐行經營進口活牛業務並不是着眼於盈利多與少，而是重視食品安全性，期望市民可以了解，並指希望可以繼續為市民服務。

毛利率低於一成

本港活牛批發價在去年六度被調高後，本月初肥牛批發價再上調4.18%，導致身為本港活牛獨家代理的五豐行成為「眾矢之的」。黎汝雄表示，內地消費強勁及要求高，令到牛肉價格持續上升，而五豐行進口的牛肉是向供應商取貨，加上品質為特級牛肉，因此五豐行無法控制價格變幅。他續指，活牛業務毛利率低於10%，因此視該業務為服務性質。五豐行整體的毛利率只有15%。

談及活牛未來的價格走勢，黎汝雄預期牛肉價格有機會再上調，由於業務毛利率低於10%，因此活牛價格會根據供應商變化進行調整。

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## 牛肉年半八度加價 肥牛一斤零售最少貴5元

【明報專訊】天氣回暖，但輸港肥牛批發價於短短兩個月第二度加價，五豐行今日開始調高肥牛批發價，每擔由4490元加至4690元，加幅4.45%，兩次累積加近一成。商會料肥牛零售價每斤最少加5元；有主打新鮮肥牛的火鍋店表示，肥牛加價太密，難以盡數轉嫁消費者。至於良種牛（普通鮮牛）批發價自去年5次加價後減價，但每斤只減3毫半，業界認為減幅太少，難以反映在零售價上，消費者未能受惠。

高永文：今年公布開放市場意向

食物及衛生局長高永文昨傍晚出席公開活動後表示，對肥牛加價感突然，政府未接獲通知。他說一般認為活牛冬季較貴，不明白為何天氣回暖後仍加價，今日會向五豐行了解。他說，政府早前已委託顧問調查，初步了解深圳牛肉價格較香港低，估計本港檢疫要求及運輸成本較高，若兩地牛肉價有明顯分別，會研究是否開放市場，望今年底前公布意向。他又說，中港兩地市場規模有別，內地對牛肉需求大，即使香港開放市場，牛肉價格不一定大幅回落。

五豐行解釋，4月中旬至今，肥牛貨源非常緊張，產地行情一路上漲，為保障供應，故提高肥牛批發價。今年至今，良種牛產地總體價格較為平穩，尤其春節後貨源緊張情況有所緩解，在確保供應充足的前提下，調低良種牛批發價。

去年初起肥牛累加四成

獨市供港內地活牛的五豐行，自去年初至今八度加活牛價，其中肥牛加價七次，由去年初的每擔3260元（一擔等如100斤）升至4690元，累計升43.9%；良種牛的批發價雖略為調低至每擔4070元，但較去年累計仍升39%。全港新鮮牛肉商發言人許偉堅表示，普通牛肉只微減，零售價料不會下降，而肥牛因加近半成，零售價每斤最少加5元，較優質新鮮肥牛每斤約170元。統計處數字顯示，上等新鮮牛肉去年3月平均零售價每斤70元，到今年3月已上漲至93元，升幅達32.8%。

牛皇星海鮮火鍋負責人表示，去年肥牛不斷加價，難以全數轉嫁消費者，已無奈將一間分店結業，該店的肥牛去年只加價一次，由每碟218元加至238元，今年未調整。他坦言若肥牛價格再上調，不排除暫時退出飲食市場。

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**Press Releases** 9 January 2013

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LCQ8: Supply and price of fresh beef  
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Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-hing and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Dr Ko Wing-man, in the Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

According to media reports, the agent which imports live cattle from the Mainland raised the wholesale price of fresh beef six times last year, pushing the retail price to new heights time and again. The current retail price of fresh beef has already exceeded \$100 a catty. In addition, the quantity of live cattle imported daily fluctuates greatly. The aforesaid situations have led to a tight supply of fresh beef, the public having to bear expensive beef price, and business difficulties for beef retailers and restaurants. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether the authorities have taken measures to stabilise the price and supply of fresh beef; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) given that the authorities have indicated earlier that they would conduct a market survey to gather and compare information on the prices, quality and costs of fresh beef in nearby mainland cities and Hong Kong, in order to get a better understanding of the reasons for the surge of fresh beef price, when the survey will be completed and the findings published;

(c) given the comments that the import of live cattle through a single agent at present has rendered the supply and wholesale price of fresh beef susceptible to manipulation and retailers lacking bargaining power, which causes a continuous surge of fresh beef price, whether the authorities will consider opening up the market to increase competition, so as to stabilise the supply and price of fresh beef; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) whether the authorities have investigated if there are lawbreakers currently smuggling live cattle into the territory, or even illegally slaughtering some local stray cattle for selling as imported fresh beef; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Maintaining stable and adequate supply of foodstuffs from diverse sources is the policy objective of the Government, in addition to ensuring food safety.

At present, all the live cattle that are imported into Hong Kong come from the Mainland. Between 2009 and 2011, the supply had been reasonably stable, with the market importing on average 70 to 80 live cattle each day. The supply in the first half of 2012 stayed at around this level. In the second half of 2012, we saw a drop in market demand due to a significant increase in the

wholesale price of live cattle. In the month of December 2012, the daily supply of live cattle was 61 on average. According to information available to us, the surge in the price of fresh beef is mainly due to tight supply and a significant increase in demand for live cattle in the Mainland. As we understand it, the present breeding stock of cattle in the whole country is at the lowest level in five years. The fertility rate of cattle and their slow rate of growth are such that cattle farmers, having to come to terms with the long breeding cycle, would not seek to expand their breeding capacity in haste. The resulting tight supply in fresh beef when taken together with other factors such as the upward movement of transport costs and wages have led to stiff prices. In the past year, the prices of fresh beef in the Mainland and Hong Kong both registered continuous increases. While the rates of increase in the wholesale price of live cattle in both places were broadly comparable, the retail price of fresh beef in the Mainland had gone up by a margin that was even wider than that in Hong Kong.

My reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(a) In light of the surge in the price of fresh beef, we have had meetings with representatives of the trade and other stakeholders in recent months to take stock of market conditions on the ground and issues of concern to the trade, including constructive exchanges with them on the supply and price of live cattle. To better understand the market situation, we will commission a consultant to conduct a market survey covering the prices, quality and costs of fresh beef in Hong Kong and nearby Mainland cities, thereby providing empirical data for informed comparisons as well as an objective basis for the Government to analyse issues related to the market and consider the way forward.

(b) The preparation work for commissioning the consultant is in progress. We aim to complete the market survey and release the findings in the second quarter of this year.

(c) There has been a suggestion that the Government should open up the live cattle wholesale market and bring in competition as a means to help spur lower prices.

The Government has an open mind about the merits of this suggestion. That said, we must give careful consideration to the possible long-term implications on the supply and price of live cattle. At present, the surge in the price of live cattle is mainly attributed to tight supply and high demand. As such, an increase in the number of import agent may not necessarily help ameliorate the market realities. On the other hand, our present market is relatively modest in size. Under such circumstances, would an increase in the number of import agent merely serve to weaken their bargaining power in sourcing live cattle from farmers, thereby reducing the incentives for farmers to maintain stable supply? In the light of tight overall supply, would the competition among agents in the bidding process translate instead into upward pressure on prices? These are questions that we must address. The Government will take them carefully into consideration when examining whether we should open up the live cattle wholesale market.

(d) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Customs and Excise Department have been regularly conducting joint operations at various boundary control points to combat smuggling activities. Up to the present moment, no illegal

*9 January 2013 (continued)*

smuggling of cattle into Hong Kong has been found. AFCD and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have not received complaints about illegal slaughtering of local stray cattle. Nor have they come across reports of missing stray cattle or the carcass of dead cattle being found. In addition, both departments are not aware of any intelligence about the smuggling of cattle or the slaughtering of local stray cattle by unscrupulous merchants for sale as fresh beef imported from the Mainland.

Ends/Wednesday, January 9, 2013

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