



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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Clerk to LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn.: Ms Alice LEUNG)
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Ms Leung,

Follow-up to the Visit to the Man Kam To Food Control Office

Thank you for your letter of 25 February 2014 requesting written information from the Administration on monitoring the food safety of vegetables supplied by the Mainland to Hong Kong as well as the related food surveillance conducted at the import, wholesale and retail levels as raised by Members during their visit to the Man Kam To Food Control Office (MKTFCO) on 24 February. Our reply is as follows:

Vegetables are not considered to be high risk food. According to information of the Department of Health, there had been no confirmed cases of food poisoning caused by pesticides during the period from 2007 to 2013. Nevertheless, the Government remains vigilant about the food safety of vegetables.

Arrangement for the Supply of Mainland Vegetables to Hong Kong

From 2011 to 2013, about 790 000 tonnes of vegetables were imported into Hong Kong annually, of which over 90% came from the Mainland. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) adopts the World Health Organization's "from farm to table" strategy when working to ensure food safety of vegetables supplied to Hong Kong.

Control at Source

To exercise control at source, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has set up administrative arrangements with the Mainland authorities, under which vegetables supplied by the Mainland to Hong Kong must comply with the requirements of the “Administrative Measures on Inspection, Quarantine and Supervision for Vegetables Supplied to Hong Kong and Macao” (the Measures) and come from registered vegetable farms and production and processing establishments under the supervision of the relevant entry-exit inspection and quarantine bureaux.

The State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) requires that applicants for registration as vegetable farms supplying Hong Kong must meet certain criteria relating to soil, irrigation water and the surrounding environment. Applicants should also satisfy requirements for the management of pesticides, pesticide sprayers and other agricultural equipment, storage place for agricultural inputs, as well as the testing capacity for pesticide residues. The inspection and quarantine authorities in the Mainland carry out routine supervision and inspection of registered farms and will take samples for food safety testing when necessary.

We have been maintaining close liaison with the AQSIQ and the respective entry-exit inspection and quarantine bureaux. We also deploy staff to conduct inspections of registered Mainland vegetable farms exporting vegetables to Hong Kong to ensure that agricultural products supplied to Hong Kong are wholesome and safe at source. In 2011, 2012 and 2013, CFS deployed staff to conduct inspections of 20, 13 and 16 registered Mainland vegetable farms supplying vegetables to Hong Kong respectively. The scope of inspection mainly covers crop production process, the application and storage of pesticides and fertilizers, the environment of vegetable farms, field management, water supplies and quality of soil, testing of produce and management of farms.

Under the Measures, vegetable farms and production and processing establishments exporting vegetables to Hong Kong are also required to establish and maintain their respective record systems for vegetable production as well as purchase and inspection of raw materials. The record keeping period must not be fewer than two years. To facilitate source tracing, production and processing establishments must affix labels on the packaging for transport and sale of their vegetables supplied to Hong Kong. Besides, to prevent supply of vegetables from unknown sources to Hong Kong, every consignment of vegetables has to come with a set of accompanying documents and the transport vehicles must bear seals.

Vegetable farms and production and processing establishments will be fined or even disqualified from being eligible to supply vegetables to Hong Kong if they do not comply with the relevant inspection and quarantine requirements.

Arrangements at Man Kam To

Fresh vegetables entering Hong Kong via the land route must be imported through the designated Man Kam To Control Point. The Mainland inspection and quarantine authorities will conduct random inspection on the seals and certificates, and random testing of vegetables at the border so that only consignments of vegetables that meet the inspection requirements and come with intact seals are allowed into Hong Kong. Staff of CFS will inspect the vegetable vehicles arriving at the MKTFCO. They will check to see if the seal on the vehicle remains intact and whether the consignment tallies with the accompanying documents, inspect the vegetables and adopt a risk-based approach in taking samples for quick tests for pesticide residues and comprehensive chemical analysis. CFS will also maintain close communication and co-operation with the Mainland authorities and the trade to exchange intelligence.

At present, about 260 to 280 vegetable vehicles enter Hong Kong from the Mainland each day via Man Kam To. From 2011 to 2013, about 90 000 vegetable vehicles were inspected at the MKTFCO. There was no report of cases involving vegetables from sources that did not tally with the accompanying documents.

CFS will detain any consignment from unknown sources or consignment that do not tally with its accompanying documents. If the test result of a vegetable sample is found to be unsatisfactory, CFS will destroy the vegetable consignment concerned and inform the relevant Mainland authorities for investigation and follow-up actions. Information about the identity of the vegetable farm and production and processing establishment concerned, as well as the transport vehicle involved will also be recorded to enable detention of their next vegetable consignment supplied to Hong Kong.

Surveillance at the Import, Wholesale and Retail Levels

CFS' Food Surveillance Programme (the Programme) monitors food on sale to ensure its compliance with legal requirements and fitness for human consumption. CFS takes food samples at the import, wholesale and retail levels and adopts a risk-based approach in determining the types of samples to be collected, the frequency and number of samples taken for testing, and the types of laboratory analysis to be conducted. The sampling programme is under regular review, taking into account factors such as past

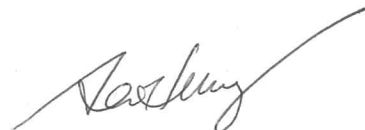
food surveillance results, local and overseas food incidents as well as relevant risk analysis. CFS will consult the Expert Committee on Food Safety (the Expert Committee) on food surveillance projects under the Programme, which will be implemented only after they have been endorsed by the Expert Committee.

Every year, CFS collects about 65 000 food samples (including some 27 000 samples of vegetables, fruits and their products) at the import, wholesale and retail levels for chemical and microbiological testing (covering metallic contamination and levels of pesticide residues) to ensure that the food meets the requirements of local legislation and is fit for human consumption. Among the relevant samples tested in 2013, only eight were found unsatisfactory. The overall satisfaction rate was 99.9% and the situation as a whole was comparable to that of 2012.

Regarding the pesticide residue testing, about 40 000 and 15 000 vegetable samples were taken at MKTFCO as well as the wholesale and retail levels respectively between 2011 and 2013 for testing. Of these, six were found unsatisfactory and the satisfaction rate was 99.9%. As for the unsatisfactory samples, CFS will arrange to destroy the problem vegetables and also inform the relevant Mainland authorities for investigation and follow-up actions.

The Food Safety Ordinance (Cap. 612) (the Ordinance) came into full operation on 1 February 2012. The food tracing mechanism¹ introduced by the Ordinance echoes the requirement for maintaining a record of vegetable production and purchase of raw materials as well as affixing labels on the packaging for transport and sale under the Measures mentioned above. This has greatly enhanced traceability and enabled CFS to promptly trace the source of the problem food and its movements in food surveillance, thereby effectively eliminating food safety risks.

Yours sincerely,



(Henry LAI)

for Secretary for Food and Health

¹ The mechanism consists mainly of the following components:

- (a) a registration scheme for food importers and food distributors; and
- (b) a requirement for food traders to maintain proper transaction records to enhance food traceability.