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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
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Honorable Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan,

Re: New Agricultural Policy

1. We welcome Government's recognition and initiatives to promote sustainable agriculture development in Hong Kong.
2. With the growth of Hong Kong as an industrial base in the 1960s and 70s, and the increasing supply of foodstuffs from across the boundary, the importance of Hong Kong's farming industry has decreased.
3. Cheap agricultural land was quickly bought up and has since been hoarded by developers. For more than 30 years now, a large part of our farmland has been subject to speculation, abandonment and eco-vandalism. For some land the development appears irreversible. For other land it is not too late to revert back to farming.
4. Another recent trend is 'fake farming'. Owners consider agriculture an effective temporary measure to keep the ecological value of their land low with regular vegetation removal / management. Making sure woodland does not mature is critical when seeking to rezone land for development later.
5. Sustainable agriculture though, apart from its contribution to GDP, protects ecological and environmental resources, creates food security, and enhances the quality of life for farmers and the community, for both current and future generations.
6. Unfortunately, the proposed policy focuses on 'Disneyland' farm project rather than initiatives which support existing farmers and which seek to protect the 4,523 ha agriculture land for farming. It should be recognized that rural developers hope infrastructure required for the 80 ha Agriculture Park would unlock nearby land for development and are proposing it to be put in or near a country park enclave.
7. We urge government to set up a cross-departmental working group on agricultural rehabilitation, and to develop a comprehensive New Agricultural Policy. For the long term, we recommend the setting up of an Agriculture Bureau with the following priorities:
 - a. The total farmland area of 4,523 ha should be safeguarded, and in the long-term the supply of land for farming should be increased.
 - b. Land reserved for agriculture and farming must be protected with adequate legislation and enforcement, as well as management.
 - c. The Town Planning Ordinance should be amended to ensure all land reserved for agriculture is used for cultivation only.

- d. All related legislation under the various Government departments should be enhanced to protect farmland habitats.
 - e. Enforcement and control over land filling and site formation should be enhanced by removing the exemption for inert waste from the waste Disposal Ordinance (s 16(2)(c)).
 - f. Control over leisure farms should be strengthened such as by providing a clear definition of “leisure farming” and by reviewing the standards for uses of land designated for leisure farming.
 - g. The definition of “Agricultural Uses” should be clarified. Standards, ratio and area limits should be set for on-farm domestic structures and farming facilities which are permitted on land zoned for agriculture.
 - h. The New Agricultural Policy should reflect the spirit of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Sustainable agriculture should be achieved by enhancing agricultural projects and activities and by adopting new farming practices. A roadmap for local agriculture should be formulated to protect our agricultural-related natural resources.
 - i. The right to use the land for farming should be safeguarded for local farmers, such as by imposing tax on land left idle, financial incentives for eco-farming practices, subsidies for farm rehabilitation, resuming land for farming and sub-leasing this to farming tenants, and so forth. These measures are needed to address the abandonment of 84% of our land zoned for agriculture due to rampant property speculation.
 - j. A clear target on food security should be pursued by setting a target self-sufficiency rate of at least 30% for vegetables. The target should be supported with a farm production policy and a strategy to enhance food supply and food safety.
 - k. Besides modernizing and subsidizing current farmers, the linkages and relationships between farmers and consumers should be supported with adequate and fair institutional arrangements and infrastructure. The distribution, marketing and sales of farm produce should be improved to ensure farmers benefit from their labour. This would help to establish a healthy community and a healthy body.
 - l. Urban agriculture should be encouraged, other than extensive farming in New Territories, with legislation and guidelines under the various ordinances to facilitate the development of community gardens, rooftop farming, and farming on land set aside in existing public parks. Urban agriculture offers opportunities for greening urban areas, better urban designs and allowing urban people to experience leisure farming downtown.
8. At last, we wish Government to acknowledge agriculture as an ancient and core industry which provides for our essential needs. It is one of the oldest industries and is strongly embedded in human culture.
 9. We should target to achieve 30% of self-sufficiency in food supply and safeguard all 4,523 ha of farmland.
 10. Here we submit our concerns for your consideration.

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