

(Translation)

(Letterhead of Food and Health Bureau)

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8 May 2015

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

Dear Ms Leung,

**Request for discussion of food imported from
areas affected by the nuclear incident in Japan**

Thank you for referring to us the letter of Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen to the Chairman of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene concerning the captioned subject. Regarding the concern of Hon MAK, our response is as follows:

2. After the nuclear power plant incident in Fukushima, Japan in 2011, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene made an order on 24 March 2011 under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) (the Order) to prohibit the import of all vegetables and fruits, milk, milk beverages and milk powder from the five most affected prefectures (namely Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma) of Japan. In addition, all chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, all poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products from those five prefectures are required to be accompanied by a certificate issued by the Japanese authorities certifying that the radiation levels do not exceed the standards laid down by the guidelines before they can be imported into Hong Kong. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of HK\$100,000 and to imprisonment for 12 months.

3. In fact, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has, since 12 March 2011, stepped up radiation testing on food imported from Japan at import, wholesale and retail levels to ensure food safety. During the routine inspection of radiation level of imported Japanese food, importers are required to produce information of the Japanese food imported, including the prefectures of origin, so as to help CFS check whether the food is from the five Japanese prefectures on which import restrictions are imposed. As at 7 May 2015, CFS has examined a total of over 250,000 relevant samples. Except for three unsatisfactory samples of vegetables from Chiba found on 23 March 2011, the test results of all samples were satisfactory.

4. In response to last month's media reports on the illegal import of food products to Taiwan from the five prefectures in Japan as discovered by the Taiwanese authorities, CFS has taken immediate follow-up actions. According to online information available on the website of the Taiwanese authorities, the food items in question were not covered by the import ban imposed by Hong Kong. CFS has proactively contacted the management of major local supermarkets and chain retail outlets to learn if the products concerned have been imported into Hong Kong. If such products are found, CFS will step up sample-taking for radiation tests. Inspections at import and retail levels will also be enhanced to see if information provided on the labels of food imported from Japan is consistent with that (including the places of origin and prefectures in Japan) provided by traders. CFS will take appropriate actions if non-compliance cases are found.

5. Since the implementation of the Order, CFS has been enhancing surveillance of the food from Japan (including those not covered by the Order) at the import, wholesale and retail levels and closely monitoring the situation to see if there is a need to prohibit more food types from being imported or supplied to Hong Kong or to adjust the control measures on Japanese food imports in a timely manner. The existing Order and related measures targeting at Japanese food imports were put in place because radioactive materials such as Iodine-131 were distributed over a wide area, found in water and on the surface of fresh agricultural produce, and were rapidly transferred from contaminated feed into milk in the initial phase of contamination. In April 2011, the Expert Committee on Food Safety held a special meeting to discuss food safety issues related to the nuclear incident in Japan. The Expert Committee considered that CFS's risk management approach was appropriate and in line with the international consensus.

6. CFS will continue to closely monitor the safety of food imported from Japan and remind importers of Japanese food that the Order is still in force. CFS will also continue its cooperation with relevant departments in monitoring the import of Japanese food so as to prevent the food prohibited under the Order from entering into the market, thereby ensuring food safety in Hong Kong and protecting public health.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

(Kenneth Chan)

for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c. Controller, Centre for Food Safety