

(Translation)

(Letterhead of Food and Health Bureau)

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19 June 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,

Safety of tea leaves from Taiwan

Thank you for referring to us the letter dated 6 May 2015 from Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan to the Chairman of the Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel). Regarding Dr Hon WONG's concern, our reply is set out as follows.

When formulating the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap 132CM) (the Regulation), the Government made reference mainly to the international standards laid down by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) in 2011, supplemented by relevant standards of the Mainland and other major food exporting countries to Hong Kong available at the time, and taking into consideration comments received during the public consultation. When drafting the standards, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) had conducted risk assessment and further

examined those standards so as to ensure that the proposed standards would be able to strike a balance between protecting public health and maintaining a stable supply of food in Hong Kong.

Neither the standards referred to nor the comments received at that time specified the maximum residue limits (MRLs) for fipronil and triazophos in tea leaves. For this reason, the MRLs for fipronil and triazophos in tea leaves are not specified in the Regulation.

However, in order to protect public health, the Regulation stipulates that except for exempted pesticides, the import and sale of food containing pesticide residues with no MRLs/extraneous maximum residue limits (EMRLs) in Schedule 1 of the Regulation is only allowed if the consumption of the food concerned is not dangerous or prejudicial to health.

As such, if fipronil and triazophos are detected in tea leaves, CFS will conduct risk assessment and will, based on the results of the assessment, decide whether the consumption of the food concerned is dangerous or prejudicial to health. Therefore, although the Regulation does not specify the MRLs for fipronil and triazophos in tea leaves, CFS can still take effective risk management measures. Hence, there is no question of loophole from the perspective of protecting the health of the public.

Besides, DDT is a type of organochlorine pesticide. Because of its possible adverse effects on the environment and human health, the use of DDT has been banned in many countries. However, since DDT is a persistent organic pollutant which can continue to exist in the natural environment for a long period of time, food commodities may contain traces of DDT.

As far as DDT is concerned, the Government has specified, in accordance with the above-mentioned principle in formulating the

Regulation, the EMRL¹ for DDT in food. The EMRL for DDT in “green tea and black tea” is 0.2 parts per million while no relevant standard is available for floral tea. In Taiwan, there is currently no EMRL specified for DDT in food. In case DDT is detected in floral tea, CFS will conduct the aforesaid risk assessment and deal with the issue by taking corresponding risk management measures.

Following the tea leaf incident in Taiwan, CFS has promptly liaised with Taiwanese authorities, made immediate contact with the relevant traders and stepped up inspections. Since April, over 200 tea leaf/floral tea samples have been taken for testing. Except for a jasmine floral tea sample from Taiwan in which triazophos residues with a level exceeding Taiwanese regulatory standard was detected, all the other samples, with results available at the moment, passed the test. CFS will continue to step up the surveillance in this respect.

We will continue to closely monitor the situation and keep in close contact with the Taiwanese authorities over the issue. We will also take control measures and law enforcement actions as necessary to ensure food safety and safeguard public health in Hong Kong.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

(Kenneth Chan)

for Secretary for Food and Health

cc: Controller, Centre for Food Safety

¹ EMRL refers to a pesticide residue arising from environmental sources (including former agricultural uses) other than the use of a pesticide directly or indirectly on the commodity. It is the maximum concentration of specified pesticide residues legally permitted in specified food commodities.