

For discussion on
2 February 2016

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Policy Address 2016
Policy Initiatives of the Food and Health Bureau

Vision

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) is committed to building a healthy society and formulating related policies under its ambit. On the food safety and environmental hygiene fronts, we will continue to ensure food safety and provide a clean and hygienic environment to promote public health and raise the living standards of our citizens.

New Initiatives

New Agriculture Policy

2. The Government consulted the public in the first quarter of 2015 on implementing a new policy on local agriculture, and how the objectives of adopting a proactive approach to support local agriculture should be achieved given Hong Kong's highly urbanised and service-oriented circumstances. Views and comments collected during the public consultation have been reported to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (Panel) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) at the meeting on 9 June 2015 (LC Paper No. CB(2)1621/14-15(07)).

3. There is a general recognition that the value of agriculture lies not just in its contribution to the economy. The development of local agriculture would help meet consumers' demand for quality local fresh produce as an alternative to imported food supply, facilitate better utilisation of the farmland resources, as well as preserve the rural environment through improving the environmental hygiene conditions and better protection of the rural areas. These will contribute to the overall sustainable development of Hong Kong in the long run. Taking into account the public's responses, the Government has decided to implement the New Agriculture Policy (NAP) to promote the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture.

4. One of the key initiatives under the NAP is the establishment of an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park) to help nurture agro-technology and agro-business management, as well as to facilitate knowledge transfer with a view to enhancing productivity. New agricultural practices for commercial production pioneered in the Agri-Park could set an example for other farms to follow, encouraging them to develop and practise modern approaches in production. The Government has identified a cluster of about 75-80 hectares of farmland in Kwu Tung South suitable for establishing the Agri-Park. We will shortly engage a consultant to conduct an engineering feasibility study to assess the initial boundary of and major infrastructure within the Agri-Park. According to our preliminary estimate, the farmland required for establishing the Agri-Park is mostly in private ownership. The Government will resume the required land pursuant to the Lands Resumption Ordinance (Cap. 124).

5. In tandem with the development of the Agri-Park and in response to calls for better protection and utilisation of existing farmland, we will commission a consultancy study to examine the feasibility of identifying clusters of farmland in the New Territories that have higher value for agricultural activities as Agricultural Priority Areas (APAs), with a view to preserving them for and incentivising the owners to put such land into long-term agricultural uses. FHB and the Development Bureau will jointly oversee the consultancy study to ensure that the initiative, if taken forward, can achieve the objective of promoting the development of local agriculture, whilst complementing better long-term planning and management of land use at the urban-rural fringes.

6. We also propose to establish a \$500 million Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) to provide funding support to promote application-oriented scientific and adaptive research and studies for agricultural production, transfer of knowledge, manpower training, and improvement of agricultural infrastructure. The SADF will also assist farmers in mechanising and modernising their farming equipment and facilities, and fund projects aimed at promoting agricultural rehabilitation.

7. Other support measures include further strengthening support and assisting farmers in moving up the value chain, promoting the marketing of produce, brand-building, as well as promoting the development of leisure and education activities auxiliary to agriculture. The various initiatives will be implemented in stages depending on their complexity, the respective procedural requirements as well as the availability of manpower and other resources.

Testing and Transportation Hub for Competition Horses

8. Hong Kong has a vibrant horse racing industry. It is also recognised internationally as a region with very high standard in terms of equine health status. Taking advantage of Hong Kong's position as an aviation hub, many competition horses in international races may make way to different places for racing via Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Jockey Club is collaborating with Mainland authorities on the development of the Club's equine training centre in Conghua, Guangzhou as a training venue for Hong Kong's competition horses. In support of the operation of the equine training centre in Conghua, an "equine disease-free zone" in Conghua will be established through close cooperation between Hong Kong and the relevant Mainland authorities, which will enable the frequent movement of horses between the two places whilst ensuring that their health status is being maintained at the same level. Tapping the opportunities, we would strengthen the testing services for equine infectious diseases at the Tai Lung Veterinary Laboratory of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). Not only would this help enhance Hong Kong's capability in testing equine infectious diseases, it would also facilitate Hong Kong's development into a testing centre of infectious diseases and a transportation hub for international competition horses, thereby bringing added room for further development of the related industries.

Regulation of Edible Fats and Oils and Recycling of "Waste Cooking Oils"

9. In view of the "substandard lard" incident which occurred in Taiwan in 2014 and the considerable public concern in Hong Kong over the safety of edible fats and oils, FHB and the Environment Bureau (ENB) decided to propose stepping up regulation of the safety of edible fats and oils and the recycling of "waste cooking oils" in Hong Kong, and consulted the public on the proposals concerned during July and October 2015. We reported to the Panel in December 2015 on the findings of the consultation and the Government's observations about the views collected. In working out specific details of the proposed regulation, we will refer to the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) standards as the blueprint so that the regulatory framework would align with the international practices and meet the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This would minimize the compliance cost and strike a balance between effective regulation and enforcement and maintaining a business-friendly environment.

10. Meanwhile, in order to promote recycling and prevent "waste cooking oils" from being reprocessed illegally into cooking oils, the

Government will introduce administrative measures to regulate recycling of “waste cooking oils”, by imposing additional licensing conditions to require all restaurants, factory canteens, food factories and bakeries to hand over their “waste cooking oils” produced in the course of food processing to “waste cooking oils” collectors, processors and exporters registered by the Environmental Protection Department and keep relevant transaction records. ENB also plans to amend the Waste Disposal Ordinance (Cap. 354) to strengthen the regulation.

Regulation of Nutrition and Health Claims for Formula Products and Prepackaged Food for Infants and Young Children under the Age of 36 Months

11. In order to better protect the health of infants and young children (IYC) under the age of 36 months, and to facilitate effective regulatory control over nutrition and health claims of formula products and IYC foods, the Government proposed to establish a regulatory framework to enhance the regulation of nutrition and health claims on formula products and IYC foods. For this purpose, we have completed the public consultation exercise in April 2015, and have reported the results to the Panel in July 2015. We are in the course of formulating specific regulatory proposals taking into full account the views of different stakeholders to ensure that the proposals concerned would be compatible with the requirements of the WTO.

Public Consultation on Regulation of the Level of Metallic Contaminants in Food

12. The Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V) (the Regulations) regulate the level of metallic contaminants in food. The current Regulations contain provisions which explicitly prohibit the import, manufacturing and sale of any food containing any metal in such amount as to be dangerous or prejudicial to health. To better protect public health, to facilitate effective regulation and to promote harmonisation between local and international standards, FHB and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) have embarked on the preparatory work of amending the Regulations. CFS has set up a working group under the Expert Committee on Food Safety to offer views on the proposed legislative amendments. The current approach of the Government is to formulate proposals for amendments to the Regulations after making reference to the Codex standards and having regard to local food consumption patterns. CFS is now carefully working out details of the amendments. We plan to conduct public consultation on the proposed amendments to the Regulations this year.

Redevelopment of Food Safety Laboratory of the Government Laboratory

13. The Government Laboratory (GL) is currently in shortage of laboratory area. As such, there is a need to redevelop Food Safety Laboratory of GL to increase its testing capacity and enhance its operational efficiency, as well as strengthen the food safety regulatory work, in preparation for the implementation of new regulations on food safety.

Improving the Operating Environment of Public Markets

14. The consultant commissioned by the Government earlier has provided a report and made recommendations on the functions and positioning of public markets, ways to improve their operating environment as well as the management mode. In June 2015, the Government briefed the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Public Markets under the Panel on the recommendations made by the consultant.

15. Having considered the consultant's recommendations and Members' views, we are now actively following up the improvement works for several public markets, with a view to enhancing their competitiveness. For two of these markets, the Government has initiated consultation with the relevant Market Management Consultative Committees (MMCCs) on the specific improvement proposals. Meanwhile, the Government will formulate exit plans for public markets and cooked food hawker bazaars with high vacancy rates to ensure that scarce land resources will be released for other developments.

16. In addition, the Government has decided to lower, with effect from 1 July 2015, the threshold of tenants' support for the retrofitting of air-conditioning systems in public markets from 85% to 80%. The Government will consult the MMCCs and in the light of their views conduct questionnaire surveys to gauge the views of the tenants on the installation of air-conditioning systems in the markets concerned.

Provision of Age-Friendly Facilities

17. The Government will also improve municipal facilities to cater for the practical needs of the elderly, thereby easing social integration. This will include the provision of additional chairs and lifts in existing public markets, and additional chairs in public columbaria. Where practicable, we will install additional age-friendly facilities in existing public toilets and provide larger

toilet compartments in newly-built public toilets for priority use by elderly people.

On-going Initiatives

Columbarium Policy

18. To cater for the growing demand for columbaria from the public, the Government has adopted a three-pronged approach namely, increasing the supply of public niches, promoting green burial and regulating private columbaria.

19. To increase the supply of public niches, the Government has been actively promoting the district-based columbarium development scheme, under which 24 potential sites in 18 districts have been identified. The Government has generally completed the initial studies. We have been consulting the respective District Councils on the development of the sites since the second quarter of 2012. Hitherto, we have consulted seven District Councils on sites in Cheung Chau, Diamond Hill, Wo Hop Shek, Tsang Tsui, Tsing Tsuen Road, Sandy Ridge, Cape Collinson and Wan Chai respectively. Together, the eight sites can provide a total of about 450 000 new niches. The Government will continue to consult the District Councils on new projects to fortify the supply of public niches in the coming 15 years.

20. In the interest of sustainability, the Government is taking active steps to promote “green burial” by encouraging the public to use a more environmental-friendly and sustainable way for handling ashes of the deceased, including scattering the ashes in Gardens of Remembrance (GoRs) or at sea. We are carrying out landscaping works in GoRs and plan to provide additional GoRs in existing public cemeteries to offer more choices to the public. In addition, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) provides free ferry service to facilitate the public in scattering ashes at sea. We will also continue to promote the Internet Memorial Service which allows the public to pay tribute to the deceased any time anywhere. The Government has launched a new round of public education efforts this year to promote green burial, through publicity means including posters and promotional videos. Besides, FEHD will continue to enhance collaboration with non-governmental organisations providing after-death services.

21. To address the long-standing problems caused by the operation of unauthorised private columbaria, the Government introduced the Private Columbaria Bill into LegCo on 25 June 2014. Through the Bill, we propose

the introduction of a licensing scheme for the purpose of ensuring that private columbaria are operating in compliance with statutory and Government requirements; enhancing protection of consumer interests; and promoting the sustainable development of the industry. We are working closely with the Bills Committee in its scrutiny of the Bill and aiming for passage of the Bill within the current legislative session.

Assistance to Hawkers

22. As at December 2015, 496 hawker stalls which are located directly in front of staircase discharge points of adjacent buildings, or obstructing the operation of fire engines or other emergency vehicular access have been duly relocated. In 2016, the Government will continue to actively take forward the Hawker Assistance Scheme (“assistance scheme”) by communicating with hawkers in hawker areas and encouraging them to make decisions early, i.e. either applying for reconstruction of their stalls or surrendering their licences for an ex-gratia payment.

23. FEHD will, as before, listen to the views of hawkers and help them improve the business environment in the hawker areas when implementing the assistance scheme. Measures include, inter alia, rationalising the overall layout of hawker stall areas where circumstances permit, and enhancing electrical safety at Hawker Permitted Places with the help of the two power supply companies.

24. We are monitoring closely the implementation of the assistance scheme. On the question of whether to issue new hawker licences to fill the vacant stalls in the hawker areas, we will give careful consideration to this issue in due course taking into account the circumstances of individual hawker areas (including their fire safety and environmental hygiene situations, the business environment, comments of relevant government departments, as well as the views of the relevant District Councils and local residents).

Keep Clean Campaign

25. The Government launched the two-month “Keep Clean 2015 @ Hong Kong: Our Home” campaign in August 2015. Having reviewed the merits of the exercise, the Secretary for Food and Health decided to establish a platform for regular exchange of views with the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Committee of the District Councils (tentatively at a six-month interval). Through the platform, FHB could keep track of the latest environmental hygiene issues in each district including the

key areas that require attention, thereby allowing us to review and adjust our strategies in a timely manner. Where appropriate, we will report the relevant discussion and follow-up work to the Panel every year.

Comprehensive Review of the Fees and Charges of Municipal Facilities and Services Provided by FEHD

26. Subsequent to the alignment of fees and charges in the urban and the New Territories regions in 2013 for municipal facilities and services provided by FEHD, we have started a comprehensive review of the levels of fees and charges for various municipal facilities and services. Given the large number of fee items involved and the need to conduct costing exercises, FEHD is taking forward the fee review exercise by phases. We will consult the Panel on individual fee proposals in due course.

Strategic Plan for Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food

27. In view of the increasing burden of non-communicable diseases (“NCD”) in Hong Kong, the Government considers it necessary to strengthen the work with respect to reduction in salt and sugar intake as this will reduce the chance of getting NCD. The Government announced in March 2015 the establishment of the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food (the Committee) to make recommendations to the Secretary for Food and Health on the formulation of policy directions and work plans to reduce the intake of salt and sugar by the public. The Government also continues to appoint the five renowned public health experts from the Mainland and overseas as members of the International Advisory Panel on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, who will share successful international experiences in promoting the reduction of salt and sugar in food to tie in with the work of the Committee.

28. Three working groups were formed under the Committee, and plan to start promulgating the proposed measures by phases in the second quarter of 2016. The Committee considers that in order to successfully reduce salt and sugar in food in Hong Kong, measures should be implemented in a progressive manner to gain the support of the community including the food industry, the public and relevant stakeholders, and recommends that the industry may take the lead on a voluntary basis to progressively lower the content of salt and sugar in food, such that not only can the public gradually adapt to changes in flavour and adopt a relatively healthier diet with less salt and sugar, the relevant industry may also have time to make adjustment accordingly and reduce the impacts of such measures on the actual operation. The Committee considers that Hong Kong should work along two directions,

namely providing more information and choices. As such, the public will have easy access to relevant information to assist them in making appropriate choices. The catering industry and food manufacturers will also be encouraged to provide healthier products with low salt and sugar content for the public to choose. The Committee will prudently review the difficulties involved in implementing the measures on salt and sugar reduction, so as to seek feasible and practical proposals suitable for Hong Kong.

Multi-pronged Strategy to Minimise the Risk of Avian Influenza (AI) Outbreaks and Enhance Food Safety

29. The Government has been adopting and will continue to adopt a comprehensive preventive and surveillance programme to reduce the risk of AI outbreaks in Hong Kong. The measures include maintaining the scale of the poultry trade at a manageable level; surveillance at the farm, wholesale, retail and import levels; tight biosecurity measures at local farms; AI vaccination of local and imported poultry; stringent hygiene requirements on wholesale and retail markets; prohibition of overnight stocking of live poultry at the retail level; and enhanced import control, etc. In view of recent reports on the circulation of different subtypes of AI virus in the region, we will stay alert in guarding against the risk of AI outbreaks in Hong Kong.

Consultancy Study on the Future of the Live Poultry Trade

30. The Government has commissioned a consultant in June 2015 to study the future of the live poultry trade including whether the sale of live poultry should continue in Hong Kong. The study is in progress and scheduled for completion in the second quarter of 2016. Thereafter, we will consult the public on the recommendations of the consultant.

Implementing Control on the Import of Poultry Eggs

31. The amended Imported Game, Meat, Poultry and Eggs Regulations (Cap. 132AK) came into effect from December 2015 to regulate the import of poultry eggs, with the aim of better protecting Hong Kong from the threat of Avian Influenza. Under the new regulatory arrangement, any person who imports poultry eggs into Hong Kong shall provide a health certificate issued by an issuing entity from the place of origin recognised by the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene to certify that the eggs are fit for human consumption, and obtain permission in writing from a health officer of the FEHD after providing relevant information on the import of poultry eggs to the FEHD to facilitate tracking of the actual importation and

surveillance on the poultry eggs by CFS, with a view to protecting food safety and public health. Fully cooked eggs or eggs that constitute one of the ingredients of a compounded food item are excluded.

Regulation of Cooked Meat

32. At present, similar to all other food, cooked meat is regulated under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), which provides that all food intended for human consumption for sale in Hong Kong, whether imported or locally produced, must be fit for human consumption. CFS takes food samples at the import, wholesale and retail levels to ensure that all meat products on the market are safe to eat. Arising from the “Husi” incident in July 2014, some members of the public and LegCo Members expressed concerns about whether cooked meat should be subject to stricter regulation. The Government will commence the preparatory work for the regulation of cooked meat, which includes studying the regulatory regimes of other jurisdictions, with a view to conducting public consultation. CFS will also step up the inspection on cooked meat this year.

Safe Use of Veterinary Drugs

33. The public is concerned about the increasing use of veterinary drugs in food animals and veterinary drug residues in food. The Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) stipulates that all food on sale must be fit for human consumption. In addition, the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF) govern the import and sale of food containing harmful substances including veterinary drugs. As regards the use of veterinary drugs in food animals, it is regulated under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Chemical Residues) Regulation (Cap. 139N) made under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance. In order to protect public health, we will keep in view international development on the regulatory control on food safety when reviewing the relevant legislation. We will brief this Panel in the second quarter of 2016 on the latest position of our efforts on the regulation of animal feed for livestock and cultured fish and the presence of veterinary drug residues.

Enhancing Animal Welfare

34. The Government has been striving to promote in the community a culture of care for animals with a view to protecting animal welfare. We disseminate messages that help promote care for animals and responsible pet ownership through various community education and promotion programmes.

In addition, for the purpose of fostering animal health and welfare, the Government has been working on the proposed legislative amendments to the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Animal Traders) Regulations (Cap. 139B) that would empower AFCD to better regulate the trading and breeding of dogs. It has taken us more time to finalise the drafting work than hitherto expected. The latest progress is such that we hope to be able to table the amendment regulation at LegCo in time for completion of scrutiny within the current legislative year.

Sustainable Fisheries Development

35. The Government has been assisting the local fisheries industry to move towards sustainable development. We set up in 2014 a \$500 million Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) to help fishermen adopt a sustainable and high value-added operation mode, and to provide funding to programmes and research that help enhance the overall competitiveness of the industry. The SFDF also provides funding support for the provision of technical assistance and training in fishing operations, assisting fishermen to switch to other modes of fishing operations or related businesses, and the modernisation of local aquaculture operations. We have hitherto received about 20 applications under the SFDF, including projects that aim at developing new aquaculture technologies, upgrading the accreditation of local aquaculture produce, and training more fishermen to participate in ecotourism.

36. In addition, through the Fisheries Development Loan Fund (FDLF), fishermen may obtain loans at low interest rate for switching to sustainable fisheries operations or related operations. Since the revision of the terms and conditions of the FDLF in 2012, the Government has approved about 90 loan applications thereunder, with a financial commitment of about \$700 million. Many of these applications were made by trawler vessel owners affected by the trawl ban who make use of the loans to build new vessels for continuing their operations in distant waters outside Hong Kong.

Setting up a control scheme for the trading of toothfish in Hong Kong

37. The trade volume and commercial activities in relation to toothfish in Hong Kong have been increasing over the years. We have proposed to introduce a new piece of legislation to provide for a control scheme for the trading of toothfish to meet the requirements of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. The preparation of the proposed legislation is in progress and the draft legislation is expected to be introduced into LegCo within 2016.

Advice Sought

38. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau
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