



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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[English Translation]

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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.: Miss Josephine SO)
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Miss So,

Pesticide Residues Detected in Organic Vegetables

Thank you for referring to us the letter dated 23 March 2016 from Hon Helena WONG to the Chairman of the Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel). Our response is as follows:

2. According to the survey findings recently released by the Consumer Council, among the 127 vegetable samples tested, two samples (including one sample of sweet potato claimed to be organic) were found to contain a pesticide residue at a level exceeding the limit stipulated in the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap. 132CM) (the Regulation). The level of the pesticide residue detected in the samples will not cause adverse health effects under normal consumption.

3. Since the Regulation came into effect in August 2014, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has taken more than 55 900 food samples at import, wholesale and retail levels for testing of pesticide residues. A total of 140 vegetable and fruit samples were detected as having excessive pesticide residues. The overall unsatisfactory rate was less than 0.3%. Through its routine Food Surveillance Programme, the CFS continues to adopt a risk-based approach to collect food samples for testing (including vegetables) at the import, wholesale and retail levels to ensure their compliance with the legal requirements in Hong Kong and their fitness for human consumption. Under the Regulation, any person who imports, manufactures or sells any food not in compliance with the requirements of the Regulation concerning pesticide residues commits an offence and is liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months upon conviction. The CFS is following up the case referred by the Consumer Council.

4. There is no universal definition of organic food, nor is there a legal definition in Hong Kong. From the perspective of food safety, all food for sale in Hong Kong, whether organic or not, are governed by the same set of food safety standards and labelling requirements. The Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) stipulates that all food for sale in Hong Kong must be fit for human consumption and are regulated by relevant food safety standards, such as those provided in the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap. 132CM) and the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V). If any person is suspected of selling agricultural products with any false claims as organic products, the Customs and Excise Department may take enforcement actions according to the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362).

5. The Government commissioned a consultancy study on organic food earlier to assess whether the production and sale of organic food in Hong Kong should be regulated. Given that there is no universal definition or regulation approach in the international arena concerning “organic food”; the market of the local organic food sector is small and the main policy objectives of the Government are to safeguard food safety and stable food supply, the consultant found no pressing need to regulate the production and sale of local organic food. The consultant has recommended that the Government enhance consumer education, increase consumers’ knowledge of organic food and strengthen the existing administrative measures, such as further promoting certification schemes, streamlining certification procedures and promulgating a reporting mechanism of food fraud (including false claims about organic food). The study findings were reported to the Panel in 2013. The Government has enhanced consumer education about organic food, and welcomes the sustained efforts made by the industry to promote organic food labelling. The Government also encourages consumers to learn more about the certification labels issued by organic food certification bodies.

6. With funding from the Agricultural Development Fund under the Vegetable Marketing Organization, the Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre (HKORC) has been providing voluntary certification service for farmers since December 2002. The HKORC has established a set of stringent guidelines with reference to international standards to ensure that the process adopted by organic farms complies with the certification standards of organic farming and production. Certified farms can attach the labels issued by the certification body to their products for easy identification. Currently, more than 140 units have been certified under the HKORC’s certification system, covering products such as vegetables, cultured fish and other processed food. The HKORC also conducts regular surveys to monitor the market situation.

Yours sincerely,

[Signed]
(Kenneth CHAN)

for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.: Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
C for C&E