

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Follow-up Actions arising from the Meeting on 8 November 2016**

**Issues relating to the Incident of Pigs Tainted with
Prohibited Veterinary Drug**

At the Panel meeting held on 8 November 2016, Members requested the Administration to provide further information relating to the surveillance at slaughterhouses and the improvement measures that had been or would be introduced. The relevant information is set out below.

Statistics

2. The Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Chemical Residues) Regulation (Cap. 139N) has come into force since 31 December 2001. Statistics of live pigs found having prohibited veterinary drug residues of beta-agonists are as follows:

	2002 – 2006	2007 - November 2016
Consignments of pigs involved	36 (1 300 pigs in total)	4 (493 pigs in total)
Number of successful prosecutions	4	1

Response to the suggestion on live pig auctions

3. The submission made by the Federation of Hong Kong Agricultural Associations (FHKAA), proposing that pig auctions should be conducted only after test results of pig urine samples are available, was discussed at a working group meeting convened by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) with the trade on 30 November 2016. Specifically, the FHKAA representative put forward two options to the working group. Option 1 was that pig auctions should not be conducted until satisfactory urine test results were obtained. Option 2 was to keep the existing arrangement of starting pig auctions at 10 a.m. every day, but the pigs auctioned should not be transferred from auction lairages to the respective holding or waiting lairages of buyers before satisfactory urine test results were available, with a view to avoiding mixing and cross contamination of different

consignments and thus facilitating the identification of the source of tainted pigs in case of positive urine test results.

4. The trade representatives attended the working group meeting, including importers, buyers, merchants' associations and slaughterhouse operators, had deliberated on the above two options and unanimously considered them inadvisable. The relevant views of the trade are as follows:

- (a) The trade representatives considered that pig auctions were commercial operation which should be complimented by the Government premised on food safety being ensured. In the light of the incident of tainted pigs released to the market in August 2016, the Government had introduced improvement measures to bring forward the completion of the daily urine testing procedures so as to allow sufficient time for the trade to take follow-up actions in the event of positive test result, with a view to ensuring that all implicated pigs would be identified and isolated timely when needed before commencing operation of the slaughter production line. Where necessary, the Government might again review and refine the arrangement, rather than shaking the foundations of the market operation.
- (b) According to the established procedure, live pigs started to arrive at Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse from around 7 a.m. every day and by 10 a.m. or so, at most only about half of the daily turnover of pigs would have arrived. Pursuant to Option 1, i.e. auctions could not start until satisfactory urine test results of all or most of the pigs were available, the auction time would have to be postponed from about 10:30 a.m. at present to 5 p.m. at the earliest. Other matters such as random inspections of lorries carrying pigs at control point or traffic accidents that happened occasionally might also delay the arrival of individual consignments from time to time. In accordance with Option 1, the auction time of those late-arriving consignments would have to be put off even further.
- (c) Both the importers and the buyers considered that if the auction time was postponed as suggested in Option 1, additional manpower would be required to support their operations due to the change and extension of working hours. Nonetheless, the trade might not be able to recruit sufficient staff to cope with the extended working hours and work arrangements arising from this

option. The trade considered that Option 1 would lead to higher operating costs and inevitably affect the market price of pigs.

- (d) Regarding Option 2, the trade representatives considered that pig auctions were conducted in the form of a production line, i.e. pigs were weighed and removed from auction lairages after auction to make room for the subsequent batches. Therefore, if the pigs auctioned had to be kept in auction lairages pending urine test results, significant adjustment in the overall operation of the slaughterhouse and additional manpower would be required to cope with the change. Besides, importers usually brought in more pigs before certain festive occasions to meet market demands. If this option was in use at such times, it would be very likely to result in serious shortage of space in auction lairages, posing difficulties to the operational arrangements of the slaughterhouse.
- (e) As regards whether the mixing of tainted pigs and other pigs in holding or waiting lairages would lead to cross contamination, the slaughterhouse veterinary section confirmed that veterinary drug residues usually remained just in the animals that had taken such drugs and would not infect other animals, and that cross-contamination through body fluid of the tainted pigs with other pigs was extremely rare.

5. Having carefully considered the views of the trade and the detailed accounts of the incident of pigs with prohibited veterinary drug residues of beta-agonists released to the market in August 2016, we are of the view that the key to the issue is not the auction time, but to ensure that no implicated pigs will be slaughtered and that the tracing mechanism for food safety works effectively. In this connection, we have reviewed closely the whole surveillance procedure, as detailed in paragraphs 6 to 8 below.

Improvements to the workflow of slaughterhouses

6. Live pigs entering slaughterhouses are subject to urine test before they are slaughtered. The overarching principle of FEHD is to ensure food safety, and thus no pigs can be slaughtered and released to the market unless the relevant consignments have passed the beta-agonists screening tests conducted by the veterinary laboratory of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). The

veterinary laboratory of AFCD releases test results of the pig urine samples in stages from 10:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. daily. If the urine test results are positive, FEHD staff will immediately notify all stakeholders, including slaughterhouse operators, importers of mainland live pigs/agents of local live pigs and buyers, such that the stakeholders and the relevant sections of FEHD will work together to relocate all pigs in question from the waiting lairages to the isolation lairages for detention in a timely manner. FEHD aims at completing the detention at least 30 minutes before the production line commences operation. Unless it can be confirmed that all implicated pigs are successfully relocated to the isolation lairages, the production line cannot commence operation on any pigs. FEHD staff will also notify the management of the department immediately for enhanced monitoring and supervision over the detention and follow-up actions to ensure that no pigs will be slaughtered before satisfactory urine test reports are obtained. If positive test results are confirmed, the tainted pigs will be destroyed and disposed in a proper way under the supervision of FEHD staff.

Improvements to the tracing of pigs

7. Following the incident of tainted pigs released to the market in early August 2016, FEHD has set up a working group comprising importers, slaughterhouse operators, buyers, retailers and other stakeholders to work closely with the trade, with an aim to establish a reliable record keeping system for maintaining accurate information of the distributors and retail outlets involved in the transaction and expediting the tracing of the whereabouts of pigs released to the market. The working group held two meetings on 26 September and 30 November 2016 respectively, in which proposals for further improving the overall workflow of the slaughterhouses as far as practicable were discussed.

8. At the above working group meetings, substantive recommendations have been made on the overall workflow of the slaughterhouses. The contents and implementation progress of these recommendations are summed up as follows:

- (a) The tattooed numbers on pigs must be clear and easily recognisable. The Centre for Food Safety has earlier written to the relevant Mainland authority to seek its co-operation in ensuring that all live pigs imported from the Mainland bear clear tattooed farm codes. In addition, FEHD has requested

importers to use different tattooed numbers to identify pigs imported on different dates, and this has already been implemented by the importers. Buyers have also enhanced their work to ensure that all live pigs bear tattooed marks of the retail outlets. FEHD will continue to conduct random checks of tattooed numbers on pig carcasses;

- (b) To facilitate the tracing of pigs, slaughterhouse operators have revamped their delivery orders to include information about the origin, transaction and transportation of the pigs;
- (c) Slaughtered pigs should be delivered to retail outlets together with the delivery orders, and buyers should maintain records about the carcasses and offal distributed to the retail outlets. Slaughterhouse operators will provide the delivery orders in duplicate to buyers and retail outlets as distribution records;
- (d) FEHD and the relevant parties of the trade should regularly conduct drills to prepare for cases of positive test results of pig urine samples with regard to veterinary drug residues. Preparatory work for the drills is underway by FEHD, with an aim to ensure that all the parties concerned are familiarised with the ways to respond and follow up if such incidents happen.

9. Participants at the meetings all agreed to implement the recommendations progressively, and that they would respectively follow up on the matters in their own areas. FEHD will continue to maintain communication with the stakeholders and review the implementation of the relevant measures from time to time.

Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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