

**For information
on 8 April 2017**

Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Incident concerning Quality of
Frozen and Chilled Meat and Poultry Meat from Brazil**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the follow-up actions taken by the Centre for Food Safety (“CFS”) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in response to the incident concerning the quality of frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil.

Background

2. CFS has all along, under its routine food surveillance programme, adopted a risk-based approach for testing food samples (including meat and poultry meat) taken at the import, wholesale and retail levels to ensure that food in the market is in compliance with the statutory requirements¹ in Hong Kong and fit for human consumption. Over the past three years, CFS took a total of 17 060 samples of meat and poultry meat for testing. Only 36 samples were found unsatisfactory, none of which were related to the quality of Brazilian frozen and chilled meat or poultry meat.

3. Brazil is a major source of frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat of Hong Kong. Since 18 March 2017, there have been media reports about product quality issues of some meat plants in Brazil and investigation into corruption or misconduct of their food safety control officials by the Brazilian authorities. According to media reports, a number of countries or regions including the Mainland, the European Union, Chile and South Korea have taken surveillance and control measures in light of the incident.

¹ The relevant legislation includes the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF), the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD), the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap. 132CM) and the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V).

Follow-up Actions

4. CFS is highly concerned about the incident, and has taken a series of follow-up actions having regard to development of the situation. The follow-up actions are taken by CFS so far mainly in three phases:

The First Phase (from 19 to 23 March)

5. Following the media reports, CFS immediately liaised with the Brazilian authorities to gather relevant information. As the information available at that time showed that investigation by the Brazilian authorities was still underway, CFS, for the sake of prudence, decided to temporarily suspend the import of all frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil starting from the evening of 21 March as a precaution.

6. CFS subsequently notified the Brazilian authorities and the trade of the import ban, and stepped up surveillance of meat and poultry meat imported from Brazil. The test results of all Brazilian meat and poultry meat samples were satisfactory, and there was no substantial evidence that meat products imported from Brazil had food safety or quality problems. Same as the approach of other countries or regions at that time, CFS did not order any recall of Brazilian meat or poultry meat in response to the incident.

7. Meanwhile, the Food and Health Bureau and CFS maintained close contact with the Consulate General of Brazil in Hong Kong (“the CG”) for the latest information in order to assess the situation and follow up on the incident. In addition, CFS organised a briefing on 23 March to keep the trade informed of the latest situation.

The Second Phase (from 24 to 27 March)

8. On 24 March, the Government received notification from the CG that the Brazilian authorities had decided to impose a ban on exports from 21 meat plants under investigation. Based on this updated information, CFS ordered in that evening a recall of all frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat imported from the 21 plants and liaised with the local importers to follow up on the recall. The temporary ban on import

of frozen and chilled meat and poultry from Brazil was maintained as a precaution.

9. Although frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil constitutes a substantial share² in the market of Hong Kong, the market share of the products from the 21 plants involved in this incident is not high. Import licences³ were issued to six of the 21 plants under investigation by CFS in the six weeks since early February 2017. The products covered by the import licences issued to these six plants only accounted for less than 1% of all Brazilian meat products covered by the import licences issued by CFS over the same period of time.

10. In addition, taking into account the trade's views that some meat products ordered from Brazil might have been shipped prior to the import ban and would arrive in Hong Kong only after the ban came into effect, CFS further decided to make special arrangements to allow the landing of Brazilian frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat shipped to Hong Kong prior to the import ban. Nevertheless, these products must be marked and sealed to prevent them from entering the market, pending completion of the relevant investigation.

The Third Phase (since 28 March)

11. On 28 March, the Brazilian authorities provided further information to the Government, indicating that they would strictly safeguard the international health certification process to demonstrate the credibility of the system, and would continue to conduct regular audits of the system to ensure the operation's efficacy. Moreover, apart from the 21 plants under investigation, there was no evidence of irregularities involving other plants authorised to export to the international market. These plants remained authorised by other countries or regions such as the Mainland, the European Union, Singapore, etc. to export from Brazil to their destinations. Over the past week, the Brazilian authorities had taken additional measures including enhanced sampling to ensure the food products' conformity with food safety requirements.

² In 2016, frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil accounted for about 45% and 33% of the market share respectively.

³ An import license issued by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department is valid for six weeks, starting from the issue date.

12. After taking into consideration the latest information provided by the Brazilian authorities and the satisfactory test results of all samples collected during continuous surveillance of meat and poultry meat from Brazil, CFS announced in the evening of the same day that the scope of import ban on frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil would be restricted to the 21 plants under investigation.

13. As at 6 April, CFS had recalled over 89 000 kilograms of the relevant products from local importers and distributors.

14. CFS will continue to enhance surveillance of Brazilian frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat at the import and retail levels for testing of meat deterioration and other food safety indicators (e.g. metallic contaminants, veterinary drug residues, pesticide residues, sorbic acid, nitrate and nitrite). As at 6 April, 180 samples had been tested for the above food safety indicators, all with satisfactory results.

15. CFS will continue monitoring development of the incident closely, and maintain close liaison with the Brazilian authorities and communication with the trade. CFS will suitably adjust its follow-up actions having regard to the latest development in order to safeguard food safety in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

16. Members are invited to note the progress of CFS's follow-up actions in response to the incident concerning the quality of frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil.

Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Centre for Food Safety
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