中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衞生局
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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18 October 2017

Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn: Miss Josephine SO)
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Miss So,

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Labelling system for genetically modified food and
proposal on introduction of pre-market safety assessment
on genetically modified food

During the discussion of the labelling system for genetically modified (GM) food and proposal on introduction of pre-market safety assessment on GM food at the meeting of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on 11 July 2017, members requested for further information on the subject, including the impact of GM food on the ecology and environment, GM ingredients that have already been approved for food use by other food safety regulatory authorities, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS)'s publicity and education efforts on GM food, and the testing technology used by the Government Laboratory (GL) in food tests for GM events. Supplementary information is provided below in response to the above enquiries from Members.

Impact of GM food on the ecology and the environment

In view of the possible impact on the local ecology following the release of genetically modified organisms (GMO) into the environment, a biosafety clearing-house mechanism has been established at the international level to provide relevant information on technological, environmental, legal and economic aspects for reference. Countries and places should draw up appropriate risk management measures and

strategies after conducting risk assessment on individual GMO according to its specific situation, such as the circumstances under which the organism will be released into the environment, the characteristics of the particular environment, the potential impact of the organism on the environment, etc.

Under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Control of Release) Ordinance (Cap. 607), any person who intends to grow GM crops in field or in an open environment must seek prior approval from the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (the Director) by submitting the relevant application together with a risk assessment report. The Director will only approve the GMO for environmental release if the possible adverse biosafety effect of the GMO is considered acceptable or manageable. In addition, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department conducts regular tests on crops from local markets and farms to check if they are GM, and to learn about the presence of GMO in the local environment.

GM food covered in Food Surveillance Programme

All food for sale in Hong Kong for human consumption (including GM food) must comply with all statutory standards on food safety, quality and labelling to ensure its fitness for human consumption. Regardless of whether the food is genetically modified, it is covered in the routine Food Surveillance Programme of CFS. CFS takes food samples at the import, wholesale and retail (including online retailers) levels and adopts a risk-based principle in determining the types of samples to be collected, the frequency and number of samples taken for testing, and the types of laboratory analysis to be conducted. CFS releases the test results to the public through various channels.

GM ingredients approved for food use by other food safety regulatory authorities

According to the information provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, as at the end of September 2017, more than 260 types of GM food have passed risk assessments of the food safety regulatory bodies of different countries or places, which include GM corn, soya bean, potato and rapeseed, etc. At present, there are over 100 types of GM food available for sale in the international market, and it is expected that more types of GM food from different places of origin will enter the international market in future.

CFS' publicity and education efforts

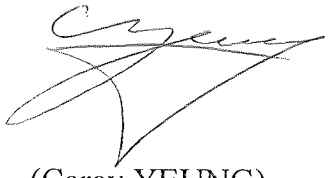
CFS disseminates information on GM food to the trade and the public through different channels. From January 2013 to September 2017, CFS organised relevant seminars in 51 schools, family service centres and elderly centres, involving over 8 000 participants. In addition, CFS organised seven trade consultation forums and made use of those occasions to discuss the proposed pre-market safety assessment scheme and labelling systems of GM food with the trade, and exchange views with them on regulation of GM food. CFS also uploads "GM Food Newsletters" onto its website

every year and distributes printed copies to the general public. CFS will continue to update the GM Food Database on its website from time to time, so as to provide the public with information on GM food approved for sale in different countries and places. Apart from active publicity and education, CFS will continue to encourage the trade to adopt the voluntary GM food labelling system.

Technology used by GL in food tests for GM events

GL uses Polymerase Chain Reaction-based method to test GM events in food. This is the most widely recognised and adopted technology internationally at present.

Yours sincerely,



(Carey YEUNG)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Attn.: Dr. Jackie YIP) (Fax: 2314 2802)
Controller, Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (Attn.: Dr. Samuel YEUNG) (Fax: 2526 8279)