

**For discussion on  
12 June 2018**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Update on Import Control on Japanese Food**

**Purpose**

This paper provides an update on the radiation monitoring of Japanese food products by Hong Kong, international expert organisations and the Japanese Government as well as the latest position of other economies in their import control over Japanese food. Also, the paper recommends allowing the import of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma into Hong Kong with conditions.

**Our current risk management measures on Japanese food imports**

2. Following the leakage of radioactive substances at the Fukushima nuclear power plants (the Fukushima incident) after the Great East Japan Earthquake in Japan on 11 March 2011, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) immediately stepped up surveillance on radiation levels of food products imported from Japan to safeguard food safety. On 23 March 2011, CFS detected that the radiation levels of three samples of vegetables imported from Chiba prefecture on that day exceeded the guideline levels of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex)<sup>i</sup>. Details of the radiation levels of those samples are at Annex A.

3. In view of the aforementioned test results and food safety risk assessment, CFS implemented the following risk management measures to prevent the import of radiation-contaminated food from Japan:

---

<sup>i</sup> Codex, established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization in 1960s, is the most important international source of reference for consumers, food producers, processors, food control agencies of respective economies and the international trade in developing food associated standards. Its General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed [CODEX STAN 193-1995, Amended 2010] is internationally accepted standards for protection of public health and facilitation of global trade following a nuclear or radiological emergency. The Codex guideline levels for iodine-131 is 100 Bq/kg while that for caesium-134 and caesium-137 in food is 1 000 Bq/kg.

- (a) on 24 March 2011, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued an order under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132) (the Order) to prohibit the import of all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk (banned products) from the five affected prefectures, namely Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma. The import of all chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products (restricted products) from the above five prefectures is prohibited, unless the food products are accompanied by a certificate issued by the competent authority of Japan certifying that their radiation levels do not exceed the Codex guideline levels<sup>ii</sup> (radiation certificate). The Order is still in force.
- (b) CFS has been conducting radiation tests on every consignment of food products imported from Japan (not limited to those imported from the five prefectures)<sup>iii</sup> ever since the Order has come into effect. CFS updates the latest figures and the test results on food products imported from Japan on its website every working day for public inspection.

### **CFS' surveillance results**

4. For the period from 24 March 2011 when the Order came into effect to 31 May 2018, CFS tested more than 490 000 samples of food products imported from Japan (not limited to those imported from the five prefectures). The test results showed that none of the samples had radiation levels exceeding the Codex guideline levels.

5. Among those 490 000 or more samples of food products imported from Japan aforementioned, only 64 were detected to have low radiation levels<sup>iv</sup>. The latest sample of food product imported from Japan detected to have low radiation levels was collected by CFS on 1 September 2016. No sample was detected to

---

<sup>ii</sup> On or before 7 December 2017, CFS required that the radiation certificates issued by the competent authority of Japan should certify that the radiation levels of the food products did not exceed the Codex guideline levels for iodine-131 (I-131), caesium-134 (Cs-134) and caesium-137 (Cs-137). According to the information provided by the international expert organisations, I-131 has a relatively short half-life (about 8 days) and will decay within a short time after a nuclear event. Having consulted the Expert Committee on Food Safety, CFS has ceased requiring the competent authority of Japan to conduct tests on I-131 in restricted products from the five prefectures with effect from 8 December 2017.

<sup>iii</sup> CFS gets hold of the information on every consignment of food products imported from Japan, in collaboration with the Customs and Excise Department. Importers will have to wait till CFS has conducted radiation tests on every consignment of the products before selling them.

<sup>iv</sup> Before the Order came into effect, two samples of food products imported from Japan were detected to have low levels of radiation which did not exceed the Codex guideline levels.

have any radiation levels since then. Of the samples which were detected to have low radiation levels from 2014 to 2016, none of them exceeded the Japanese levels (see paragraph 8 below for details), which are more stringent than the Codex guideline levels.

6. CSF has been inspecting every consignment of food products imported from Japan ever since the Order has come into effect. There were illegal imports of banned products (e.g. carrot, watermelon, radish, cabbage, dried milk) from the five prefectures (4 cases between 2012 and 2015), and the import of the restricted products (e.g. frozen pork, beef, chicken) from the five prefectures which were not accompanied with the required documentation including the radiation certificate (6 cases between 2012 and 2016). Results of CFS' radiation testing on the samples from those consignments showed that only individual samples contained traces of radioactive substances which did not exceed Japanese levels (and of course did not exceed the Codex guideline levels). Since May 2016, cases of illegal import of banned products or import of restricted products from the five prefectures which were not accompanied with the required documentation were not found.

7. Details of CFS' surveillance results are at Annex B.

### **Japan's risk management measures and surveillance results**

8. The Japanese Government enhanced its monitoring on radiation in food grown or produced in Japan in the aftermath of the Fukushima incident, to safeguard food safety. Based on risk assessment, Japan re-evaluated its maximum levels for certain radionuclides after the Fukushima incident and established new standards on radioactive caesium (aggregate of Cs-134 and Cs-137), which are more stringent than the Codex guideline levels. The Japanese levels on radioactive caesium in food (the Japanese levels) came into effect on 1 April 2012. A comparison of the Japanese levels and the Codex guideline levels in respect of radioactive caesium is as below:

<b>Food category</b>	<b>Japanese levels on radioactive Cs-134 and Cs-137 (aggregate)</b>	<b>Codex guideline levels on radioactive Cs-134 and Cs-137 (aggregate)</b>
General foods	100 Bq/kg	1 000 Bq/kg
Milk	50 Bq/kg	
Infant foods		

9. Information from the Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) showed that over 2 million food samples were collected in Japan for radiation testing as at early March 2018. Only a small number of food samples (about 1 200) were found to have exceeded Codex guideline levels (Annex C). Among those 1 200 or so samples, about 90% were taken in or before March 2013, and nearly 60% came from Fukushima. When there were food samples detected to have exceeded the Japanese levels (even though not exceeding the Codex guideline levels), the Japanese Government will prohibit the domestic sale and export of the products concerned.

### **Views of international expert organisations on the safety of Japanese food**

10. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have been monitoring the impact of the fallout of the Fukushima incident on health and food safety, and have confirmed the safety of Japanese food from the perspective of radiation levels for quite some time, for example –

- (a) as early as April 2011, FAO and WHO advised the food authorities of different economies to comply with Codex principles with regard to scientific justifications when implementing relevant food control measures; and
- (b) in its report issued in January 2014, IAEA considered that Japan had made good progress in the recovery of affected farmland in addressing food safety concerns. Actual measured radionuclide concentrations in the vast majority of food (except for some forest products such as game animals and mushrooms) were significantly below the relevant limits and were constantly decreasing. IAEA reiterated in March 2018 that the food supply chain in Japan was safely under control.

### **The latest position of import control on Japanese food by other economies**

11. Many economies have introduced import ban and/or restrictions on Japanese food at varying magnitude following the Fukushima incident. Increasing amount of information and data that facilitate surveillance and risk assessment have been available over the years. Taking into account scientific evidence, surveillance results and views from international expert organisations, many of the economies have lifted their import ban/restrictions totally or partially in recent years, with or without conditions (e.g. requesting for radiation certificates to be accompanied with the products which were once banned). That said, economies were more prudent in respect of the import restrictions on food products from Fukushima. The latest position is as follows:

<b>Economies</b>	<b>Current import control on Japanese food</b>
27 economies including Canada, Australia and New Zealand	Import ban on Japanese food was lifted. Radiation certificate was not required for the import of any Japanese food.
United States	Adhere to the list of food items prohibited for domestic sale / export by the Japanese Government.
EU	Import ban on Japanese food was totally lifted in late 2017, but radiation certificate is required for the import of certain types of food from certain prefectures including Fukushima.
Singapore	Import restrictions on certain types of food products from some prefectures were lifted (i.e. no longer require radiation certificate) and import ban on certain types of food products from Fukushima was lifted in 2014. Currently, the import of all food products from certain areas of Fukushima and certain types of food from Fukushima is banned. Radiation certificate is required for the import of certain types of food products from Fukushima and three other prefectures.

12. No announcement on excessive radiation in food samples (including vegetables, fruits, milk products) from Japan (including the five prefectures) was made by the EU, United States, Canada, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand in the past three years.

13. The Mainland<sup>v</sup> and Taiwan<sup>vi</sup> have been examining their import control on Japanese food.

### **Review and assessments**

14. Ensuring food safety is the Government's prime consideration. The Food and Health Bureau and CFS have been reviewing the risk management measures on food products imported from Japan in the light of the latest situation. The factors taken into account include local surveillance results, assessments

<sup>v</sup> At present, the Mainland has banned all types of food products from 10 prefectures, and requires radiation certificate on various types of food products from the remaining 37 prefectures of Japan.

<sup>vi</sup> At present, Taiwan has banned all types of food products from five prefectures of Japan.

made by international expert organisations, surveillance results of the Japanese Government, the latest position of import control on Japanese food by other economies, consistency of the control measures with the World Trade Organization's requirements<sup>vii</sup> and public concern, etc..

15. As mentioned above, none of the 490 000 or more samples of food products imported from Japan tested by CFS after the Order took effect were found to have radiation levels exceeding the Codex guideline levels. The vast majority of the 2 million or more Japanese food samples tested by the Japanese Government complied with the Codex guideline levels. Since May 2016, there have been no illegal imports of banned products from the five prefectures or import of restricted products from the five prefectures which were not accompanied with the required documentation. Since September 2016, none of the samples of food products imported from Japan and tested by CFS were detected to have any radiation levels. International expert organisations have not queried the safety of Japanese food in terms of radiation levels. More and more economies have lifted their import ban/restrictions totally or partially over the years, with or without conditions. All these are solid and scientific evidence suggesting that the radiation level of Japanese food readily available for sale and export in general is unlikely to pose health concern.

16. However, we observe that some economies are still adopting a more prudent approach on food from Fukushima. While the number of food samples detected to have radiation level exceeding the Codex guideline levels by the Japanese Government over the years was insignificant, those food samples mainly came from Fukushima.

## **Proposals**

17. Having carefully considered all relevant factors, we propose to continue the import ban on banned products from Fukushima while allow the import of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from the four prefectures of Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma into Hong Kong with conditions. The conditions are as follows:

- (a) each consignment of those food products must be accompanied with radiation certificates issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry

---

<sup>vii</sup> World Trade Organization's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement stipulates that when establishing or maintaining sanitary or phytosanitary measures to achieve the appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection, Members shall ensure that such measures are not more trade restrictive than required to achieve their appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection, taking into account scientific evidence, relevant inspection, sampling and testing methods, technical and economic feasibility, etc..

and Fisheries (MAFF) which will show which of the four prefectures the products come from and attest that the radiation levels of the products do not exceed the Codex guideline levels; and

- (b) the exporter concerned must hold and produce a valid exporter certificate issued by MAFF to certify that those food products exported to Hong Kong by the exporter concerned are readily available for sale in Japan (i.e. they cannot exceed the more stringent Japanese levels) and are fit for human consumption as far as radiological protection is concerned. If any exporter is found to have failed to comply with the aforementioned requirements, MAFF must revoke the exporter certificate promptly and notify CFS.

18. The proposed arrangements are similar to our existing import requirements on game, meat, poultry, poultry eggs and aquatic products from the four prefectures, but are buttressed by the exporter certificate as an additional safeguard.

19. A comparison of the existing and proposed import restrictions on Japanese food products is at Annex D.

### **Continue to safeguard food safety effectively**

20. The proposed arrangements will continue to safeguard food safety effectively. The arrangements involve two levels of gatekeeping, i.e. the Japanese Government's gatekeeping work at the places of export and CFS' gatekeeping work at the import level. CFS and MAFF will enhance communication with each other in respect of information and intelligence exchange.

21. We understand that some public members may be concerned about the possibility that banned food products from Fukushima will be imported into Hong Kong illegally as products from the other four prefectures (e.g. mixing of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dry milk from Fukushima into the consignments of those products from Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba or Gunma). Given our requirements for radiation certificates and exporter certificates, MAFF as the issuing authority of the certificates must ensure that each consignment of those products comes from Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba or Gunma but not from Fukushima, and attest that the radiation levels of the food products do not exceed the Codex guideline levels as well as the more stringent Japanese levels.

22. In addition, CFS will continue to conduct radiation tests on every consignment of food products imported from Japan (not limited to those imported

from the five prefectures), and strengthen inspection and testing on vegetables, fruits and milk products from the four prefectures. CFS will also inspect the radiation certificate, shipping documents and information on packages on each consignment of food products imported from Japan to make sure that those products do not come from Fukushima or have not been mixed with banned products from Fukushima. Importers will have to wait till CFS has conducted radiation tests on every consignment of the products before selling them. CFS will continue to update the latest figures and test results on food products imported from Japan on its website every working day for public inspection.

23. CFS will continue to prohibit the import of all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dry milk from Fukushima, with a view to addressing the concerns of some members of the public on food safety in respect of Fukushima.

24. CFS will strengthen its risk communication work to keep the public informed of the latest situation and instil in them a correct and clear understanding of the risk of Japanese food in terms of radiation. Besides, CFS will maintain close communication with the trade regarding the proposed arrangements to ensure smooth operation.

### **Next step**

25. The proposed arrangements require the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene to make the corresponding amendments to the Order which have to be gazetted.

### **Views Sought**

26. Members are invited to comment on the contents of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau  
Centre for Food Safety, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
June 2018**



**Radiation levels of the three samples of vegetables from Chiba, Japan**

<b>Types of samples</b>	<b>Date of sampling</b>	<b>Test results</b>	<b>Codex Guideline Levels</b>
White radish	23 March 2011	I-131: 260Bq/kg Cs-134: Not detected Cs-137: Not detected	I-131: 100Bq/kg  Radioactive Cs-134 and Cs-137 : 1 000Bq/kg
Turnip		I-131: 800Bq/kg Cs-134: 25Bq/kg Cs-137: 26Bq/kg	
Spinach		I-131: 1000Bq/kg Cs-134: 8.5Bq/kg Cs-137: 19Bq/kg	

## CFS' surveillance results

Year/ month	Before the Order took effect (11-23 March 2011)	2011 (from 24 March onwards)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (January to May)	Total (after the Order took effect)
Number of samples tested (approximate)	300	61 000	50 000	56 000	61 000	73 000	74 000	84 000	34 000	490 000
Number of samples exceeding Codex Guideline Levels	3 Chiba (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of samples with low levels of radionuclides	2 Chiba (2)	3 Shizuoka (3)	41 Shizuoka (38) Kanagawa (1) Hokkaido (1) Saitama (1)	5 Shizuoka (1) Tokyo (2) Kanagawa (2)	8 Shizuoka (4) Tokyo (2) Tokushima (1) Osaka(1)	2 Chiba (1) Ibaraki (1)	5 Iwate (4) Niigata (1)	0	0	64
Number of samples exceeding Japanese levels (which took effect on 1 April 2012)	N/A	N/A	11 Shizuoka (10) Saitama (1)	1 Shizuoka (1)	0	0	0	0	0	12

<b>Year/ month</b>	<b>Before the Order took effect (11-23 March 2011)</b>	<b>2011 (from 24 March onwards)</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018 (first 5 months)</b>	<b>Total after the Order took effect</b>
<b>Number of cases of illegal import (all of the samples did not exceed Codex guideline levels or Japanese levels)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>

**Food samples found to have exceeded Codex guideline levels  
by the Japanese Government  
(March 2011 to March 2018)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of unsatisfactory food samples</b>	<b>Food types (number of samples involved)</b>	<b>Prefectures involved (number of samples involved)</b>
March 2011 to March 2012	929	Not applicable #	Fukushima (451) Gunma (37) Tochigi (69) Ibaraki (150) Miyagi (14) Yamagata (1) Iwate (10) Nagano (2) Saitama (102) Kanagawa (18) Tokyo (16) Chiba (59)
April 2012 to March 2013	171	Game (108) Wild plants and wild edible mushrooms (24) Edible mushrooms (17) Aquatic products (17) Tea products (4) Vegetables (1)	Fukushima (131) Gunma (2) Tochigi (11) Ibaraki (7) Miyagi (5) Iwate (14) Nagano (1)
April 2013 to March 2014	61	Game (39) Wild plants and wild edible mushrooms (21) Aquatic products (1)	Fukushima (58) Nagano (2) Miyagi (1)
April 2014 to March 2015	32	Game (28) Wild plants and wild edible mushrooms (4)	Fukushima (27) Nagano (3) Miyagi (2)
April 2015 to March 2016	10	Game (10)	Fukushima (8) Gunma (1) Miyagi (1)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of unsatisfactory food samples</b>	<b>Food types (number of samples involved)</b>	<b>Prefectures involved (number of samples involved)</b>
April 2016 to March 2017	38	Game (35) Wild plants and wild edible mushrooms (3)	Fukushima (35) Gunma (1) Tochigi (2)
April 2017 to March 2018	6	Game (6)	Fukushima (6)
Total	1 247		

# Since the Japanese Government has not adopted standardised categorisation of its food samples for the period from March 2011 to March 2012, there is no breakdown on the figures by individual food types.

**Comparison of existing and proposed import restrictions  
on Japanese food**

<b>Prefectures</b>	<b>Food products</b>	<b>Existing import restrictions</b>	<b>Proposed import restrictions</b>
Fukushima	Vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk	Banned. <b>(No change)</b>	
	Chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, poultry eggs, live, chilled or frozen aquatic products	Allowed to be imported if accompanied with radiation certificate. <b>(No change)</b>	
Chiba, Gunma, Ibaraki and Tochigi	Vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk	Banned.	<b>(Proposed arrangements)</b> Allowed to be imported on the conditions that they are accompanied with: (a) exporter certificate; and (b) radiation certificate.
	Chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, poultry eggs, live, chilled or frozen aquatic products	Allowed to be imported if accompanied with radiation certificate. <b>(No change)</b>	