



香港金鐘道 66 號金鐘道政府合署 45 樓
45/F Queensway Government Offices,
66 Queensway, Hong Kong
電話 Telephone: 2867-5408 傳真 Fax: 2530-1368

本函檔號 Our ref. : FEHD CFS/1-125/55/3 C
來函檔號 Your ref. : CB4/PAC/R71

4 January 2019

Mr Anthony CHU
Clerk to Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Fax: 2543 9197)

Dear Mr Chu,

Legislative Council Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 1 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 71
Centre for Food Safety: Management of Food Safety

I refer to your letter dated 19 December 2018, requesting this Department to provide supplementary information on Chapter 1 "Centre for Food Safety: Management of Food Safety" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 71. The relevant information is set out in the attached document please.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Christine Chow' in a cursive script.

(Christine CHOW)

for Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

c.c.:

Secretary for Food and Health	(Fax no. 2526 3753)
Controller, Centre for Food Safety	(Fax no. 2536 9731)
Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury	(Fax no. 2147 5239)
Director of Audit	(Fax no. 2583 9063)

**Replies to Public Accounts Committee's Letter
of 19 December 2018**

(a)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) is the designated contact point for the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Through INFOSAN, the CFS directly receives information on emergent food safety incidents issued by food safety authorities from 188 Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, the CFS regularly monitors the Chinese and English websites of food safety authorities of other economies through its Food Incidents Surveillance System (FISS) in order to collect food incident information and intelligence relevant to these economies.

In case follow-up investigation on the relevant information reveals local availability of the affected food in such food incident, and that it will result in adverse health impact to the public and/or violate the local legal requirements, the CFS will adopt one or more risk management and communication measures, including issuing press release, trade alerts and take food recall actions.

Rapid Alert to Trade (trade alert) is sent through electronic means to traders who have registered to receive the alert. Regarding the 300 trade alerts which were issued in 2013, the CFS is not able to identify the exact reasons for the apparently high number of trade alerts issued in this year. It could not be ruled out that during the initial phase of this new trade alerting mechanism, the criteria for issuing of trade alerts were still evolving and some trade alerts might have been unnecessarily issued.

(b)

For details on Cases 8 and 9 in Chapter 1 of the Audit Report, please refer to the written information on item (r) in the Department's letter to the Public Accounts Committee on 2 January 2019.

(c)

Food recall guidelines are promulgated in the CFS's website for reference by the food traders. Please see **Annex 1**. Regarding the measures that have been implemented or will be implemented to monitor the conduct and effectiveness of the food recall exercises, please refer to item (s) of the Department's written information dated 2 January 2019, including the update of the food recall guidelines on the CFS's website to facilitate the food traders to conduct the recall exercise effectively and unambiguously. Towards this end, a trade consultation forum was conducted on 14 December 2018 to collect feedback from the trade. The updated guidelines will be completed in the first quarter of 2019.

Should the food traders do not follow the Food Recall Guidelines in carrying out the recall exercise, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene may, under Food Safety Ordinance (Chapter 612) issue orders to direct the food traders to recall the subject foods.

(d)

Details of the 23 food recall exercises in Table 10 of the Audit report are set out under item (s) of the Department's written information dated 2 January 2019. The quantities of food recalled from the 23 food recall exercises are set out in **Annex 2**.

The CFS has implemented improvement measures to proactively and closely monitor the entire food recall exercise carried out by the food traders, as well as to demand the food traders to submit regular progress reports. The CFS will soon update the food recall guidelines on the website, and will clearly specify that the food traders must dispose of the recalled foods under the supervision of the staff of the CFS.

In the event of a massive food incident, the CFS will flexibly deploy manpower to handle different types of work including: ensuring the food traders to take off from the shelf the affected products upon receiving the instructions from the CFS, and to stop sale in the market and initiate recall; as well as carrying out checks of the concerned distributors and retailers to ensure the affected product will not enter the market. Taking the handling of the Brazilian frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat

***Note by Clerk, PAC:** Please refer to Centre for Food Safety website for Annex 1.

incident in 2017 as an example, upon receipt of media reports on 21 March 2017 about the quality problem of the exported Brazilian meat, the CFS liaised immediately with the Brazilian authority. For the sake of prudence, the CFS decided to take precautionary measures on the same day to temporarily suspend the importation of frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat produced in Brazil. The CFS also immediately notified the Brazilian authority and the local traders of the relevant measures. The quantity of Brazilian meat and poultry meat involved in the incident was 92,337 kg. A total of 89,217 kg of meat and poultry meat was recalled and the recall rate was 97%.

(e)

See reply to (c) above.

(f)

The Department uses the Complaint Management Information System to keep the information on all complaint cases. In addition, the CFS maintains a database to keep information on food complaint cases, including the types of food being complained about and the outlets where there are repeated food complaints.

In October 2018, the CFS has enhanced the existing food complaint database, including to add the recording of the entering countries of origins of the foods under complaint. The CFS is planning to set up a new database system to maintain information on the progress of investigation of the food complaint cases, so as to more comprehensively monitor the handling of food complaint cases.

In addition, the CFS has set up a dedicated team in 2017 to conduct a comprehensive review, standardize the operational procedures of the food import regulatory and monitoring system by phases and to reorganize its information system on a large scale to support the frontline colleagues on data management and analysis. The relevant work will strengthen the CFS's regulatory work on food import, food surveillance, food safety incidents, risk assessment and traceability.

(g) (i)

For the “Handling Procedure of Various Kind of Food Complaint Received by Food Complaint Unit (FCU)”, please refer to **Annex 3**. For relevant internal guidelines, please see **Annex 4** (only English version is available). The operational manual and guideline are internal documents concerning the enforcement details of the Department, which are not suitable for public disclosure, or else the enforcement work may be affected in the future.

(g) (ii)及(iii)

Food complaints lodged with the Department are, in the first place, handled by the responsible district environmental hygiene offices. These offices then forward the complaints to the CFS for investigation. In 2017, 5,569 food complaints were forwarded to the CFS, with breakdown of the types of complaints as follows:

Type of complaints	No. of complaints
● Cases with exhibits, complainants have provided statements and agreed to testify in court.	586
● Cases with exhibits, but complainants have refused to provide statements and disagreed to testify in court.	1,403
● Cases without exhibits, and with or without statements by complainants.	3,580
Total:	5,569

In 2017, the CFS conducted 3,584 visits to premises under food complaint for taking food samples. In the same year, the CFS issued a total of 1,031 warning letters to those incriminated premises and initiated 149 prosecutions related to food complaints. Of which, 146 were convicted and a fine of \$500 to \$20,000 was imposed, 2 cases were acquitted and 1 was awaiting for trial.

In 2017, the Department ordered 3 licensed food premises (involved in food complaints and contravention of relevant legislation) to suspend business for 7 days, after the operators were prosecuted by the CFS and were convicted.

***Note by Clerk, PAC:** *Annexes 3 and 4 not attached.*

(g) (iv)

The CFS classifies food complaint cases under the type of “Unwholesome Food” when the complainant alleges that he/she felt sick after consumption of food. Examples of incriminated food include: sushi, sashimi, frozen confections, etc.

(h) (i)

The number of food complaints handled by the CFS increased by 30% (1,275 complaints) from 4,294 (in 2014) to 5,569 (in 2017). The CFS analysed the trend of the food complaint cases in the year and found that (i) all food complaint cases were isolated/sporadic incidents and there were no epidemiologically linked cases, (ii) in the year, there have been several well-publicised food scandals, namely, faked rice & rice products, faked seaweed and faked eggs, leading to a significant increase in the number of food complaints, (iii) some individuals lodged complaints specifically at some shops, for example, a complainant lodged a total of 140 food complaint cases targeted at a chained-supermarket in 2017.

(h) (ii)

The Food Complaint Unit of the CFS is overseen by Assistant Director (Risk Management), and assisted by a Senior Superintendent of Environmental Health to take care of the handling of food complaints. The number of staff members responsible for the handling food complaints from 2014 to 2017 are set out as follows:

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Health Inspectorate				
Superintendent of Environmental Health [^]	1	1	1	1
Chief Health Inspector	1	1	1	0
Senior Health Inspector	1	2	3	3
Health Inspector I/II	13	12	13	14
Other Grades				
Executive Officer II [^]	1	1	1	1
Clerical Assistant	2	2	2	2
Workman II	3	3	3	3
Grand Total	22	22	24	24

[^] : The Superintendent of Environmental Health and the Executive Officer II also oversee / assist Food Labelling Unit of the CFS.

(h) (iii)

In 2017, there have been several well-publicised food scandals including, faked rice & rice products, faked seaweed and faked eggs. 88 out of 118 complaints of “Fake/counterfeit food” were found to be related to faked rice & rice products, 8 cases were found to be related to faked eggs and 6 cases were found to be related to faked seaweed.

The CFS conducted thorough investigations of all 118 complaints, including the taking of food samples for testing. All testing results were found to be satisfactory and all complaints found unsubstantiated. The CFS also used social platforms to publish information to clarify the incidents and to dispel public concerns.

(h) (iv)

In 2017, the CFS handled a total of 733 food complaint in “deteriorated food”. 49 complaints were substantiated cases, the incriminated food included mainly meat and meat products, dairy products (milk and milk beverages) and fruit and vegetables, etc. The remaining 684 cases were unsubstantiated.

For those substantiated complaint cases, the CFS issued a total of 43 warning letters to those incriminated premises and initiated 6 prosecutions related to food complaints. Of which, 5 cases were convicted and imposed with a fine of \$3,000 to \$ 10,000 and 1 case was acquitted.

(i)

Prosecution figures were updated in “Table 13 - Time taken to close complaint cases (2017)” of the Audit Report as follows:

Time taken to close complaint cases (2017)

Time lag between date of complaint and eventual closing of the case (No. of days)	Complaint cases		Prosecution cases No. (Note)	
	No. (Updates)	Percentage (Updates)		
0 to 30	2,116	38%	-	
31 to 60	806	15%	-	
61 to 90	637	11%	-	
91 to 120	461	8%	-	
121 to 150	391	7%	21	
151 to 180	529	10%	72	
181 to 210	498	9%	46	
211 to 240	101	2%	8	
241 to 270	17		1	
271 to 300	4		-	
301 to 330	3		-	
331 to 360	2		-	
361 to 390	2		-	
391 to 420	1		-	
421 to 432	1		1	
Grand Total	5,569		100%	149

Note: The prosecution cases are filed within the statutory time, and the closing date depends on the time required for the court to hear and complete the relevant judicial process.

(j)

The CFS's guideline on handling of food complaint states that the investigating officer should obtain enforcement sample right away in case of the incriminated food involves specified food category, namely frozen confections, dairy products (milk and milk beverages), sushi, sashimi, raw oyster, siu mei and lo mei, etc.

The CFS has revised relevant guidelines in May 2018 such that the enforcement sample would be obtained right away in case the incriminated food involves seasonal food or specified food category that are available on a time-limited basis. The CFS conducted regular review and updated the guidelines whenever necessary.

(k)

The CFS has revised relevant guidelines in May 2018 such that the enforcement sample would be obtained right away in case the incriminated food involves seasonal food or specified food category. For the period from 1 May 2018 to 15 December 2018, the CFS took a total of 318 enforcement samples. Testing results of 3 were unsatisfactory. The CFS publicised within 24 hours upon confirmation of the unsatisfactory testing results. The CFS initiated prosecution against the incriminated vendor/manufacturer on the unsatisfactory testing results.

(l) (i)

The CFS was established in May 2006 and has launched its website simultaneously. The annual statistics of the website's page views, hits and visits are as follows (approximate figures):

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Pages	180K	3010K	10430K	9160K	14220K	14920	18940	21230	28870K	20740K	23580K	30940K
Views						K	K	K				
Hits	1460K	24400K	74790K	53040K	63840K	70720	81660	94080	150360K	147630K	127970K	142470K
Visits	50K	610K	1460K	1430K	1520K	1660K	1840K	2130K	3100K	3000K	3330K	4890K

Remarks: K = 1000

(l) (ii)

The CFS Facebook was launched in October 2013. The number of "likes" of the CFS Facebook increased from 7,335 on 11 December 2016 to 12,179 on 31 December 2018.

The total post reach of the CFS Facebook in 2018 was 964,511.

(l) (iii)

The CFS launched a dedicated Facebook page “Hong Kong's Action on Salt and Sugars Reduction” (HKASSR) in January 2015. The page was face-lifted in 2017, introducing a youthful, relaxed and trendy element to enhance the appeal of the page as a key platform for promoting information on salt and sugar reduction and activities to the public. The number of “likes” of “HKASSR” Facebook reached 9,511 on 31 Dec 2018.

The total post reach of “HKASSR” Facebook in 2018 was 1,677,003.

(l) (iv)

To promote messages on the reduction of salt and sugar in food, the Instagram page of “HKASSR” was launched in July 2018. The number of followers of the “HKASSR” Instagram was 1,623 as at end December 2018.

(l) (v)

The CFS set up its mobile app “Food Safety” in April 2014. The number of download of the “Food Safety” app was 19,214 as at end December 2018.

(l) (vi)

As at end December 2018, the number of subscribers of CFS’s Rapid Alert System was 100,941.

In 2017, a total of 84 Rapid Alert messages were sent through the Rapid Alert System.

(m)

From time to time, the CFS provides food safety information to the public through various channels, such as press releases, CFS Facebook, publications on food safety (paper format and electronic format), pamphlets and posters. The CFS also organises workshops, talks and roving exhibitions regularly to disseminate food safety messages to different sectors of the community. While the CFS issues press releases on

food safety incidents or food safety messages that affect the public or with public concern, at the same time, related information will be disseminated through the CFS Facebook more frequently. According to the experience of CFS, the key to whether food safety messages issued by CFS are reaching out to various sectors of the community depends on the degree of public concern about the message. For example, the recent advices from CFS to members of the public not to eat raw grass carp and uncooked locally harvested oysters reached out to different sectors of the community.

(n)

The community organisation exhibitions presented in Table 16 refer to those food safety exhibitions organised by community organisations which have borrowed exhibition panels and materials from CFS. The number of community organisations that organise exhibitions each year depends on a number of factors, including the community organisation's activity plan in the year, whether the organisation chooses food safety as the theme of the exhibition, whether the organisation needs to borrow exhibition panels and materials from CFS to hold food safety exhibitions, etc. The CFS will consider how to disseminate information to community organisations so that they know they can borrow CFS panels and materials to organise food safety exhibitions. The number of participants in community organisation exhibitions depends on a number of factors, including the location of the exhibition, opening hours, community organisation mobilisation, and whether there are other types of activities in the same venue, such as game booths and souvenirs given away. The 13 community organisation exhibitions held in 2017 are shown in the table below:

Community Organisation Exhibitions in 2017		
Name of Organisation	Location	Opening hours
Health Education Exhibition & Resource Centre	Kowloon Park, Tsim Sha Tsui	08:45 to 18:15
Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong Baptist University	09:30 to 16:30
Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong Baptist University	09:30 to 16:30
We're Family	Tsz Wan Shan Community Hall	13:30 to 17:00
Lions College	Lions College	08:00 to 17:00

Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong Baptist University	09:30 to 16:30
Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong Baptist University	09:30 to 16:30
Hong Kong Baptist University	Hong Kong Baptist University	09:30 to 16:30
Free Methodist Church Tuen Mun Children & Youth Integrated Service Centre	Leung King Estate	11:00 to 19:00
Free Methodist Church Tuen Mun Children & Youth Integrated Service Centre	Yau Oi Estate	11:00 to 19:00
Ma Tau Chung Government Primary School	Ma Tau Chung Government Primary School	08:00 to 15:00
Hong Kong Playground Association	2/F, Island Place, North Point	10:00 to 22:00
Southern District Healthy & Safe Association Limited	Aberdeen Promenade	14:00 to 17:00

(o)

The CFS organises roving exhibitions in public markets at different locations. The usual exhibition time was from 10 am to 4 pm, Monday to Friday, mainly considering manpower and operational arrangements. With reference to the recommendations of the audit report, the CFS has plan to extend the exhibition time to 6 pm and will further explore other improvement measures, including hiring external staff to be on duty at the roving exhibition, roving exhibitions at different locations and extending the exhibition time to 8 pm, as well as holding exhibitions on weekends, etc., to increase the number of visitors.

Apart from uploading information of the exhibitions to the CFS website, the CFS will further enhance publicity, such as providing information of exhibitions to e-news subscribers to promote the exhibitions.

(p), (q), (r) and (t)

The Food Safety Charter and “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme are part of the work of Risk Communication Section of CFS. The promotion of the programmes to the trade and the public is mainly through the annual event “Food Safety Day” of CFS and articles in Food Safety Bulletin and Food Safety Express. The annual expenses of the

programmes are included in the total expenditure of the Risk Communication Section and cannot be calculated separately.

The Food Safety Charter is a voluntary scheme that encourages the food trade to bear in mind and actually implement the “Five Keys to Food Safety” in its daily operation. Taking into consideration that no matter whether the food trade has participated in Food Safety Charter or not, all food premises are regulated by various licensing requirements and conditions to ensure food safety and hygiene, and that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has implemented the Hygiene Manager (HM) & Hygiene Supervisor (HS) scheme which requires all licensed food business to appoint a hygiene manager and/or hygiene supervisor to strengthen food safety supervision of food premises, the CFS will review the objectives and effectiveness of Food Safety Charter and decide the way forward. If we continue to maintain the Food Safety Charter after review, we will introduce improvement measures to monitor the commitment of the signatories of the scheme.

Food safety and healthy eating are closely related. Unhealthy eating habits, including eating too much high-sugar, high-sodium or high-fat foods, can put a burden on your health, which can lead to overweight or obesity and high blood pressure, and increase risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The food safety regulations in Hong Kong include regulating nutrition labelling of prepackaged foods. Via the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap 132W), prepackaged foods are required to list the nutrient content, including the contents of sodium and sugar.

The Government has been striving to promote salt and sugar reduction for the whole population. The work is jointly implemented by the Food and Health Bureau, the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, the Department of Health (DH) and the CFS to achieve synergy. The “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme is only one of the measures taken by the Government to promote salt and sugar reduction for the population.

The “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme is a voluntary programme launched by CFS in 2014. The objective is to encourage the food trade to take reference to the CFS trade guidelines for reducing salt, sugar and oil in foods when preparing food and accept the customers’ request to have less salt, sugar and oil when ordering food. In the past few years, the main challenge that CFS faced when promoting the “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme is that the public’s acceptance of salt and sugar reduction is not high. The salt and sugar reducing food culture

has not yet established in our community. The food trade has not been able to gain insight into the business opportunities of reducing salt and sugar. Therefore, the food trade participation has not been positive. The CFS also has room for improvement in promoting the programme.

In response to the above, the Food and Health Bureau, the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, the DH and the CFS have been promoting low-salt and low-sugar in the past few years through “starting from an early age”, enhancing information transparency and strengthening publicity and education. The food culture has enabled the public to gradually change the salty and sweet eating habits, accept a relatively healthy diet and promote the demand for food with less salt and sugar, so that the trade can cooperate more actively. The work has gradually been achieving results. For example, the “Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunch” launched by the DH in the 2017/18 school year, 12 participating lunch suppliers provide over 1,200 sodium-reduced lunch options for about 480 primary schools in Hong Kong, the average sodium content per lunch was 14% lower than that of 2013. In 2018, a fast food restaurant chain in Hong Kong has introduced a variety of dishes with salt content that meet the definition of low sodium in Hong Kong. The publicity work of the committee through social media has also aroused public interest and positive response.

Earlier this year, the Food and Health Bureau and the CFS have explored ways to step up the promotion of salt and sugar reduction work that has gained good foundation and momentum over the past few years. Together with the food premises in Hong Kong, we will jointly lead the trend of reducing salt and sugar. A new scheme has been launched in recent months to involve restaurants in Hong Kong that have vision and commitment to salt and sugar reduction to lead and influence, and to provide delicious food/dish with less salt and/or less sugar, or welcome customers ordering food with less salt and / or sugar. We expect the new scheme to have initial results in early 2019 and more significant results by the end of 2019. A large-scale salt and sugar reduction campaign with the new scheme kick-off will be held in February 2019. “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme will be integrated into the new scheme. We will closely communicate with the restaurants participating in the new scheme and review the effectiveness and challenges of the scheme in a timely manner and adjust the plans as necessary.

(s)

When the mobile application of CFS was developed, the launching of “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme was not confirmed. Therefore, the design of the mobile application has not included a search function for the “Reduce Salt, Sugar, Oil. We Do!” programme.

- END -

Need to ensure proper disposal of recalled foods

Table 10

Disposal of foods in 23 recall exercises

(2017 年)

Disposal practice	No. of recall exercises	Recalled product	Details of disposal action
Disposal under supervision by the CFS			
Fully supervised by CFS staff	11 (48%)	1. Infant and young children formula	35,803 tins
		2. Preserved bean curd	2,891 cans
		3. Prepackaged baby biscuits	191 packs
		4. Eggs	3,425 cartons
		5. Prepackaged cereal for babies	174 packs
		6. Ribena	108,681 bottles
		7. Prepackaged salad products	116 boxes
		8. Energy drink	16 boxes
		9. Prepackaged spaghetti bolognese	123 boxes
		10. Prepackaged protein bars	1,941 pieces
		11. Milk cheese (Note 1)	3.35 kg
Partly supervised by CFS staff (Note 2)	1 (4%)	12. Prepackaged fruit juice	6,459 packs
<i>Sub-total</i>	12 (52%)		

Disposal without supervision by the CFS			
Disposal conducted by traders		13. Raw oysters	11 kg
		14. Prepackaged minestrone soup	13 cups
		15. Raw oysters	847.58 kg
		16. Prepackaged haggis and black pudding products	180 pieces
		17. Cheese	48.69 kg
		18. Cheese with truffle	70.12 kg
		19. Prepackaged vegetable soup	18 boxes
<i>Sub-total</i>	7 (31%)		
Disposal not needed			
Food sold out	3 (13%)	20. Anchovy paste	0 carton
		21. Pork rillettes	0 kg
		22. Bottled watercress honey	0 bottle
Food recalled but found to be in order (Note 3)	1 (4%)	23. Frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat	89,217 kg
<i>Sub-total</i>	4 (17%)		
Total	23 (100%)		

Note 1: Importer confirms that the affected product is distributed to only one food premise and all has been returned to the importer for disposal. The affected product is disposed of under the supervision by the CFS.

Note 2: The affected product is disposed of by the importer under the supervision by the CFS, and the disposal of affected product at retail level is carried out by the food trader.

Note 3: Being in order, the food is subsequently returned to the trader.