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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 11 June 2019**

Government's strategy towards prevention of African Swine Fever

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Government's preventive measures and contingency plans in response to African Swine Fever ("ASF"), and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

Outbreaks of African Swine Fever on the Mainland

2. ASF is a serious, highly contagious and viral disease in pigs, which is caused by ASF double-stranded DNA virus. The virus can cause massive infection and death in pigs¹ within a very short period of time, and it demonstrates extremely high potential for trans-border spread. As neither vaccine nor treatment is currently available, ASF poses a severe threat to the pig rearing sector and relevant industries in every place in the world as well as the overall live pig supply.

3. According to the information published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ASF was first detected in Kenya in Africa in 1909 and was first introduced into Portugal in Europe in 1957. Subsequently, ASF spread to a number of European countries and gradually moved eastwards in recent years. According to the World Organisation for Animal Health, ASF had, between 2016 and 2018, caused losses of some 820 000 swine in Europe, Africa and Asia. In August 2018, ASF was first

¹ The mortality rate of pigs infected with ASF could be as high as 100%.

found on the Mainland; and during the subsequent five months, there were ASF outbreaks in 23 Mainland provinces and municipalities.

4. According to the information provided by the Administration in January 2019, over 90% of live pigs consumed in Hong Kong are supplied from registered pig farms on the Mainland supplying live pigs to Hong Kong ("registered farms"). In 2018, a total of 1.47 million live pigs were imported from the Mainland (averaging around 4 000 heads per day) and some 100 000 live pigs were supplied by the 43 Hong Kong's local pig farms (averaging around 290 heads per day).

Government's preventive measures and contingency plans in response to ASF outbreaks

5. According to the Administration, since the first ASF case on the Mainland in August 2018, the Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") have put in place a suite of measures to prevent ASF from infecting Hong Kong and impacting the local pig rearing sector. The measures include:

- (a) enhance the biosecurity work in various areas, including local pig farms, boundary checkpoints and slaughterhouses;
- (b) enhance the cleansing and disinfection in different areas of live pig supply (including strictly control the access of vehicles and personnel entering and leaving local pig farms, the slaughterhouses as well as the slaughter lines and lairages);
- (c) inspect the health certificates of all live pig consignments from the Mainland and monitor the health status of live pigs at the boundary checkpoints;
- (d) all imported and local pigs have to undergo ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections in slaughterhouses before supplying to the market;
- (e) step up the surveillance of live pigs supplied to the market; and
- (f) if suspected symptoms are detected in pigs, samples will be taken and immediately sent to AFCD's laboratory for rapid tests.

6. Apart from the above, the Administration has disseminated information to the trade and pig farmers about prevention against ASF via different channels (e.g. seminars, letters etc.), with a view to raising their awareness on disease precautions.

Members' concerns

7. At the Panel meeting on 8 January 2019, the Administration briefed members on various measures implemented for preventing the spread of ASF to Hong Kong. Members' major views and concerns are summarized below.

Threat and impact posed by the outbreak of ASF on the Mainland

8. Some members were concerned that unscrupulous traders on the Mainland might use pigs infected with ASF to make chilled/frozen or processed/preserved pork products. They enquired about the measures taken by the Administration to prevent contaminated pork products from entering the local food supply chain, and whether CFS would enhance inspection and testing of samples of pork products at the boundary checkpoints.

9. According to the Administration, CFS would ensure that all live pig consignments and imports of chilled/frozen pork products from the Mainland were accompanied by valid health certificates. The Administration stressed that ASF was not a zoonotic disease and would not be transmitted to human, hence posing no food safety risk. Pork and pork products were safe for human consumption if they were thoroughly cooked.

10. Regarding members' concerns about the impact of ASF on the supply of live pigs from the Mainland and the food safety risk caused by tourists' illegal importation of raw or half-cooked pork meat, the Administration advised that the supply of live pigs from the Mainland had remained steady (both in terms of quantity and auction price), with no extraordinary fluctuation. The Administration had all along been keeping a close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities to maintain a steady supply of live pigs and to ensure that all live pigs came from qualified registered farms that were not affected by ASF.

11. The Administration further advised that according to the Imported Game, Meat, Poultry and Eggs Regulations (Cap. 132AK), it was an offence to import into Hong Kong raw meat (including half-cooked pork) without a health certificate issued by an issuing entity from the place of origin or prior written permission from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD"). Offenders were liable on conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment. Other than the measures mentioned in paragraph 5 above, FEHD had strengthened cooperation with the Customs and Excise Department in cracking down on illegal importation of raw meat by passengers into Hong Kong. FEHD had also enhanced publicity by posting posters at control points and by disseminating information via social media to promote the message that it was an offence to carry raw meat into Hong Kong without a health certificate.

Contingency plans including culling arrangements in case of ASF outbreak in Hong Kong

12. Members were deeply concerned about the risk of ASF incursion into local farms. Enquiries were raised about the pig culling arrangements and contingency plans devised in response to different scenarios in case of ASF outbreak in Hong Kong.

13. According to the Administration, although ASF did not involve any food safety issue, owing to the need to prevent this disease from infecting local pig farms, pigs tested to be ASF-borne or coming from ASF-infected registered farms would be culled and not be released to the market. If a registered farm on the Mainland was infected with ASF or located within or near to the ASF infected area, its supply of live pigs would be suspended.

14. The Administration also advised that in the situation of ASF infection among any local pig farm, all pigs in that farm would be culled and the farm would be cleansed and disinfected thoroughly. Re-stocking of pigs for business resumption could only take place upon inspection to the satisfaction of AFCD veterinary surgeons. AFCD would also block and prohibit the movement of pigs of other farms within three kilometres of the infected farm and closely monitor the situation. In addition, AFCD had amended the licence conditions for livestock keeping, banning the storage or use of swill of animal origin as pig feed effective from 12 January 2019, with a view to minimizing the risk of contracting ASF virus via swill feeding. To ensure that the preventive measures are properly implemented, AFCD would conduct regular inspections to all local pig farms. AFCD veterinary surgeons would observe the use of feed in pig farms during inspections. If non-compliance with licence conditions was found, AFCD might consider cancelling the licence of the pig farm concerned. Moreover, pig farms were required to obtain prior approval of AFCD for the type(s) of feed to be used for pig rearing.

15. For slaughterhouses², the Administration stressed that the primary aim of conducting culling operation was to prevent virus from being carried away. Since infected pigs would have weaker immunity and might cause other hygiene problems, all infected pigs or the pigs that had been in contact with the infected pigs would be culled. Other pigs in the slaughterhouse concerned would be subject to thorough examination by AFCD veterinary surgeons. Sampled testing would be conducted if necessary, e.g. when the pigs were suspected to be infected. Pigs would be supplied to the market only after they were confirmed to be not infected. The slaughterhouse concerned would be

² The two local slaughterhouses are located respectively in Sheung Shui and Tsuen Wan.

thoroughly cleansed and disinfected after clearance, and could only resume operation upon inspection to the satisfaction of AFCD veterinary surgeons. AFCD had devised the procedures for culling. Each pig culled would be compensated according to the relevant market price of its type (i.e. porkers, breeding pigs and piglets).

16. In response to members' enquiry as to whether the preventive measures adopted by the Administration were on par with or less stringent than those implemented by the Mainland authorities, the Administration reiterated that according to the contingency plan for local pig farms, in the event of ASF infection, all pigs in that farm would be culled, and the farm would be cleansed and disinfected thoroughly. Re-stocking of pigs for business resumption could only take place upon inspection to the satisfaction of veterinary surgeons. AFCD would also suspend and prohibit the movement of pigs of other farms within three kilometres of the infected farm, and closely monitor the situation. If any pigs in those farms were found to be infected with ASF, all pigs therein would also be culled. This arrangement was generally in line with that adopted by the Mainland authorities.

Slaughterhouse operation

17. There was a suggestion that the Administration should consider segregating live pigs raised at local pig farms from those imported from the Mainland and sending live pigs of different sources to different slaughterhouses for slaughtering (i.e. slaughtering local pigs at Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse and imported pigs at Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse ("SSSH")). In members' views, the segregation arrangement could help prevent cross infection if live pigs imported from the Mainland were infected with ASF and, in case of ASF outbreak in Hong Kong, help prevent a total suspension of the two local slaughterhouses and ensure a basic supply of live pigs for consumption by the public in Hong Kong.

18. The Administration advised that the operators of the slaughterhouses, due to their own commercial considerations (such as the differences in slaughtering capacities of the two slaughterhouses and delivery arrangements for pork/pork products etc.) had reservations about the segregation arrangement. The Administration emphasized that while segregation of pigs for slaughtering was one of the possible options worth exploring, the Mainland authorities had all along been exercising proper management and control at source, striving to maintain a steady supply of live pigs to Hong Kong.

Recent developments

19. On 10 May 2019, AFCD confirmed the first case in Hong Kong of ASF in which virus was found in a pig in SSSH. In order to minimize the risk of ASF virus spreading in Hong Kong and following international practice, all pigs (around 6 500 heads) in SSSH were culled so that thorough cleansing and disinfection could be conducted. The operation of SSSH had been suspended for more than one week until the completion of the disinfection work.

20. On 1 June 2019, AFCD announced another incident of a pig sample from SSSH detected to have infected with ASF virus. This time, about 4 100 pigs in SSSH would be culled. According to the Administration, while the operation of SSSH would be suspended for thorough cleansing and disinfection, Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse will continue to assume normal slaughtering operation.

21. The Administration will brief members at the Panel meeting on 11 June 2019 on the follow-up work due to the detection of ASF in SSSH.

Relevant papers

22. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 June 2019

**Relevant papers on Government's strategy towards
prevention of African Swine Fever**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	8.1.2019 (Item VI)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Legislative Council	29.5.2019	<u>Written question raised by Hon SHIU Ka-fai on "Incidents of pigs in slaughterhouses infected with infectious diseases"</u>

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