

**For discussion on
29 October 2019**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Policy Address 2019-20

Policy Initiatives of the Food and Health Bureau

Vision

The Food Branch of the Food and Health Bureau is committed to formulating, co-ordinating and implementing policies on agriculture, fisheries, food safety, veterinary public health and environmental hygiene so as to promote public health and raise the living standards of our citizens, with a view to building a healthy society.

New Initiatives

Public Markets

2. We are pressing ahead with the building of new markets in Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung Town Centre, as well as planning for a new market in Kwu Tung North New Development Area. Meanwhile, we will complete the study on site selection for the Tseung Kwan O new market shortly. District Councils will be consulted as soon as possible following the commencement of a new term next year.

3. Apart from building new markets, we will introduce new operation mode on a trial basis, which will mainly reform the leasing and management systems of public markets with a view to enhancing business vibrancy and meeting the needs of residents. Public markets under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will serve a greater social function in the future through place-making for the residents, in addition to the sale of food and daily necessities.

4. It was announced in the Policy Address last year that a new public market would be built near Tin Shui Wai West Rail Station. Given it takes time to build a market and to enable the public to benefit early, the Secretary for Food and Health has announced that a temporary market would be built at the open space adjacent to Tin Sau Road Park using the Modular Integrated Construction method. This market is expected to be completed and commissioned by the end of next year at the soonest.

Environmental Hygiene

5. Through the enhanced interdepartmental coordination, the mosquito prevention and control work this year has been effective with the monthly ovitrap index for *Aedes albopictus* dropping significantly since June. The index has also improved over that of last year. It is the first time since 2015 that no area exceeded the alert level in the rainy season in August this year. While the figures of dengue fever cases recorded in some nearby Asian regions are much higher than last year and the number of imported dengue fever cases recorded is significantly higher over the same period in 2018, there have been no confirmed local cases in Hong Kong this year.

6. In the application of technologies to enhance pest control, FEHD has put on trial ovitraps with improved design in Wong Tai Sin, Cheung Chau and Yau Tong to calculate the density of adult mosquitoes directly since June this year. The new design will be generally adopted next year for the provision of adult mosquito density data to the public. In recent months, FEHD has introduced a new design of mosquito trap which involves the carrying of insect growth regulators by female mosquitoes to other water bodies, thus preventing mosquito larvae from maturing. As the new trap proves to be effective, FEHD has provided these traps to the relevant departments for application in suitable locations in Ma On Shan and Sheung Shui. As regards rodent surveillance, FEHD has put on trial night vision and thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence to capture video images for monitoring the extent of rodent activities since April. These technologies would allow better understanding of rodent infestation causes, extent of rodent activities as well as population to facilitate more targeted rodent control work.

7. The Government has commenced the territory-wide cleansing operation from May 20 with an extension of the operation by three months to mid-November. Cleaning work and enhanced enforcement actions have been carried out, targeting rodent blackspots such as back alleys, housing estates, food premises, hawker areas and public markets. Public education and publicity have also been strengthened in this regard. During the operation, government departments work closely together for effective rodent control in areas under their respective purview. For example, the Highways Department has completed the repair works of 99 back alleys with damaged road surface or surface channels, the Housing Authority has launched the Summer Cleaning Campaign in public rental housing estates since June, and FEHD has conducted a special operation targeting irregularities of food premises for food preparation and other activities at back alleys.

8. To achieve effective pest control in the long run, government departments will gradually include pest control clauses in new service contracts for better monitoring of contractors' performance and effectiveness of pest control work. The Buildings Department and Architectural Services Department have drawn up practice notes for building professionals' reference on incorporating rodent prevention design in new buildings. FEHD will hold seminars for building professionals in November on rodent prevention design in buildings.

9. FEHD will apply technologies in various areas to improve hygiene, enhance management and achieve timely maintenance of public toilets. It has also launched pilot schemes to provide air treatment and other facilities in public toilets, such as Atomized Ozonated Water Technology, Microalgae Technology, Nano Bubble Technology, Nano Plasma Driven Catalyst Air Purification Technology, Nano Confined Catalytic Oxidation Technology and Antibacterial Coating Technology. When refurbishing public toilets, FEHD will provide attendant rooms and improve facilities for toilet attendants as far as possible.

Keeping and Cremation of Abortuses

10. The Government has commissioned its first facility for keeping

abortuses, named “Garden of Forever Love”, at Wo Hop Shek, Fanling since April 2019. In the future, we plan to provide similar facilities in other districts¹ with a total of about 1 300 keeping spaces. In addition, FEHD will set up a dedicated cremation facility for abortuses in Wing Hau Street, Kwai Chung (near Kwai Chung Crematorium).

Enhancing Animal Welfare

11. The Government attaches great importance to promoting and safeguarding animal welfare, and has been adopting a multi-pronged approach to carry out the relevant work, which includes enhancing public education, handling and preventing acts of animal cruelty, and working closely with animal welfare organisations. We have conducted a public consultation exercise on the proposals to enhance animal welfare in mid-2019 and are collating the views to establish the proposals for legislative amendment.

Sustainable Agricultural and Fisheries Development

12. The Government has been supporting the agriculture and fisheries industry to move towards high value-added sustainable development. We will implement the key initiatives under the “New Agriculture Policy”, including the establishment of an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park) in Kwu Tung South, the New Territories. The works of the Agri-Park Phase 1 will commence as soon as possible after obtaining funding approval of the Legislative Council (LegCo), and is expected to be completed in stages from 2021. As regards fisheries, we are actively expanding rooms for the mariculture sector to further develop and helping fishermen switch to other modes of operation, including preparing for the designation of new fish culture zones, re-issuing new marine fish culture licences starting from early-2020, and establishing a modern mariculture demonstration farm in 2020 to assist the sector in upgrading and switching to modern fishery operations.

13. Besides, the Government will also continue to make use of the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) and the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) of \$500 million each to provide financial support for the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture

¹ Cape Collinson in Eastern District, Shek Mun in Shatin and Sandy Ridge in North District.

and fisheries. So far, these two Funds have approved funding of about \$200 million. Through the dedicated schemes set up under the Funds, farmers and fishermen can apply for financial assistance up to \$30,000 to purchase equipment for improving their productivity. So far, more than 1 600 farmers and fishermen have benefited directly from the schemes. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will continue to implement enhancement measures for the Funds to further remove barriers in making applications, and facilitate and encourage the sector to make use of the Funds to enhance its overall competitiveness.

Food Safety

14. We have been closely monitoring the international developments and measures relating to safeguarding food safety, including making reference to the food safety standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other economies, as well as taking into account the local dietary practice and risk assessment results, to timely update the local food safety standards and regulatory arrangements on the basis of scientific evidence. After the completion of legislative amendments to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations last year, we have been working on proposals to update the regulatory regime of harmful substances in food, including industrially-produced trans fats and mycotoxins. We plan to conduct public consultation on the proposals next year.

On-going Initiatives

Guarding against African Swine Fever

15. Since the first African Swine Fever (ASF) case on the Mainland in August last year, the Government has been striving to prevent and control ASF at different levels, with a view to reducing the risk of ASF virus spreading in Hong Kong and the impact on the supply of live pigs. In response to the ASF cases found on two occasions in Hong Kong in May 2019, and taking into account the views of local and overseas experts and with the support of live pig trade, the Government has imposed a daily clearance arrangement, which means all live pigs will be slaughtered within 24 hours upon admittance into

the slaughterhouses. Under the new arrangement, lairages in different areas of the slaughterhouses will be cleared out and undergo thorough cleansing and disinfection every day. Since the period of stay for pigs in the slaughterhouses is short and the comprehensive daily cleansing and disinfection, together with the enhancement of cleaning and disinfection of vehicles transporting pigs, the risk of ASF spreading in Hong Kong has been largely minimised.

16. At the second meeting of the standing group of experts on ASF organised by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in July this year, the attending experts had an in-depth discussion on the prevention and control measures against ASF. They regarded that each region should take its own situation into consideration, such as the stocking density, demand and supply of live pigs etc., to formulate effective and practical measures and policies. Given that the local slaughterhouses have already implemented the daily clearance arrangement, the experts considered that the possibilities of infection and spread of the virus to other pigs in Hong Kong has been largely minimised. Therefore, if an ASF case occurs in a local slaughterhouse, the closure of the slaughterhouse and mass culling of other pigs are considered not necessary. Other pigs can be slaughtered as usual and supplied to market for consumption.

17. The far-reaching implications of ASF on the supply of live pigs on the Mainland and worldwide are gradually emerging. The Government will continue to closely monitor the development of the outbreak and improve epidemic prevention work, while liaising with different parties to minimise the risk of transmission and maintain steady supply of live pigs.

Burial Policy

18. The Government is determined to take forward the burial policy by adopting a three-pronged approach, namely, increasing the supply of public niches, regulating private columbaria, and promoting green burial.

19. On public niches, the Government will continue to press ahead the

district-based columbarium development scheme². In 2019, the columbarium projects at Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek in North District would be completed respectively, accounting for about 208 000 new public niches, among which about 21 000 have been open for application in mid-2019. Moreover, the projects at Sandy Ridge in North District and Shek Mun in Shatin are pending the approval of the LegCo Finance Committee and its Public Works Subcommittee. The Government will continue to identify suitable sites for the construction of public columbaria, and timely consult the District Councils on other columbarium projects and seek funding approval from the LegCo.

20. Regarding the regulation of private columbaria, the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (the Licensing Board) has thus far approved 4 licence applications and agreed to approve another application in principle. Meanwhile, 13 applications have been refused for non-compliance with the requirements. As some of these non-compliant columbaria are located in multi-storey buildings or high-density residential areas, the refusal of their applications will reduce the impact on nearby residents caused by their operation. The Licensing Board will continue to process the remaining applications expeditiously. We will also continue to keep in view the implementation of the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630) for improving the regulatory regime.

21. In 2018, there were more than 7 000 green burial cases³, accounting for about 14.8% of the total number of deaths in Hong Kong. As of September 2019, the number of green burial cases accounted for over 16% of the total number of deaths this year, representing a slight increase compared with the same period last year. This reflects the growing popularity of green burial. In the coming year, we will step up promotion efforts, including promoting the Green Burial Central Register and cooperating with various sectors.

Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance in relation to the Agriculture and Fisheries Industry

² 14 projects under the scheme are at different development and design stages, together providing a total of about 590 000 new niches (representing two thirds of the total number of new niches under planning).

³ These include scattering ashes at Gardens of Remembrance or at sea.

22. To enhance surveillance on antimicrobial usage (AMU) and monitoring the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in local food animal farms, AFCD commissioned a consultancy study in October 2017 to devise a surveillance programme suited for local implementation. Upon consultation with the Expert Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance in March 2019, the surveillance plan proposed in the study was finalised for implementation. In addition, to implement the “veterinary prescription-only medication supply” measure, SADF and SFDF have approved funding for undertaking pilot projects for the provision of veterinary services. Funding has been approved for the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong to provide veterinary services to local food animal farms. AFCD anticipates that the measure will be rolled out in the second half of 2020 when the relevant veterinary services become more mature.

Election of Members from the Veterinary Profession to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong

23. To implement the amendment ordinance on the registration of veterinary surgeons, we plan to introduce into the LegCo this year a subsidiary legislation for the arrangements for electing members of the veterinary profession to the Board, so that the Board can timely proceed with the preparation for the election of veterinary surgeons to be members of the Board.

Advice Sought

24. Members are invited to note this paper and provide comments.

Food and Health Bureau
October 2019