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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 13 July 2021

Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey

Purpose

This paper provides background information on Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey ("FCS") conducted by the Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

2. According to information available on CFS' website, the purpose of FCS is to collect food consumption data of the population, including the types and amount of food consumed by individuals. The data collected are used to assess whether the public is exposed to any potential dietary risks (such as pesticides, metallic contaminants and food additives) and to understand the magnitude of the risk and which population groups may be most at risk. Such information is vital in the Administration's formulation of public policies, risk management measures as well as education strategies for promoting food safety in Hong Kong.

3. CFS conducted the First FCS between 2005 and 2007. The survey report was subsequently released in April 2010 and published on CFS' website¹.

¹ The survey report (English version only) is accessible at CFS' website https://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_firm/files/FCS_final_report.pdf

4. According to the information provided by the Administration in May 2018, given that the dietary habits of the population might have changed over time since the First FCS due to socio-economic and cultural factors and trends, it was necessary to conduct the Second FCS to gauge the latest local food consumption habits, so as to keep the food safety regulatory regime, strategies, and measures up to date. The Second FCS, commenced on 13 April 2018 and expected to last for about one year, would cover 5 000 respondents among the land-based non-institutional population of Hong Kong aged 18 or above. Respondents selected for the Second FCS would be invited to attend two interviews for collecting information on (a) foods and drinks consumed in two specific 24-hour periods ("24-hour diet recall") and (b) the consumption of certain foods in the past 12 months ("food frequency questionnaire").

Members' concerns

5. At the Panel meeting on 8 May 2018, the Administration briefed members on the details of the Second FCS as well as the significance of the survey to the food safety risk assessment and regulatory work. Members' major views and concerns are summarized below.

Application of the survey findings

6. Enquiries were raised about the areas of work relating to food safety and diet-related health to which the Administration had applied the findings of the First FCS, and the actions taken by the Administration to improve the food consumption patterns and food safety of the people of Hong Kong in light of the survey findings.

7. According to the Administration, CFS conducted the First FCS to collect food consumption information among individuals. The survey findings had been applied in CFS' food safety risk assessment work and food regulatory measures development, including daily risk assessments, the First Hong Kong Total Diet Study² and various topical risk assessment studies. The results of the risk assessments provided scientific basis for CFS to

² According to the information provided by the Administration in May 2018, the objective of the First Hong Kong Total Diet Study (published in 2011) was to estimate dietary exposures of the Hong Kong population and various population subgroups to a range of substances, including contaminants and nutrients, and assess any associated health risks. The Study comprised sampling and food preparation, laboratory analysis and dietary exposure estimation. The findings contributed to a comprehensive picture of Hong Kong adult population's exposure to various contaminants and nutrients through food consumption.

formulate and deploy appropriate risk management measures, and prepare appropriate food safety messages (e.g. dietary advice to women of childbearing age on the potential health risks to foetus upon methylmercury exposure during pregnancy). The survey findings also provided scientific information for further assessment on the priorities for legislative work and the prevailing local food safety standards.

8. There was a suggestion that the Administration should consider regulating salt and sugar contents in food by legislation or fiscal measures (e.g. "sugar tax") if the food consumption pattern of the population moved towards an increased or excessive intake of salt and sugar. Some members urged the Administration to follow up the results of FCS with the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food ("CRSS") so as to devise and implement strategic plan/measures for encouraging reduced intake of salt and sugars in food to promote a healthy diet.

9. The Administration advised that it had applied various findings of the First FCS in the promotion of balanced diet. For example, the identification of major sources of salt in the local diet had contributed to targeted salt reduction strategies and public education. The Administration assured members that it attached much importance to the reduction of salt and sugar intake of Hong Kong people and would work closely with CRSS and give consideration to measures suggested for salt and sugar reduction appropriate to Hong Kong's context.

Survey details

10. Some members opined that there was room for improvement regarding the design of the questionnaires used in the First FCS for obtaining food consumption data. In these members' view, respondents might have difficulty in providing answers in a precise manner to some of the questions (e.g. the amount of certain food items consumed which was measured in serving/gram/tael). Concern was also raised about whether the findings drawn from the corresponding consumption data of certain food items described in specific cooking methods (e.g. "marinated chicken feet") could give a complete picture of the overall food consumption pattern of the population.

11. The Administration advised that when conducting interviews for the Second FCS, to minimize reporting errors and ensure data quality, the survey interviewers, who were extensively trained prior to data collection, would guide the respondents to provide the required information. The interviewers would bring along sample bowl, plate, cup, spoon as well as photos of utensils in other sizes and show them to the respondents to help the latter estimate the

amount of food taken. Besides, a food photo booklet showing various food items in specific quantities and their relevant weight was available to help the respondents estimate the consumed amount of each item relative to the photo. According to the Administration's explanation, while the 24-hour diet recall captured the most common types of food consumed by the population, items less likely to be captured in the 24-hour diet recall interviews, such as festive foods or items of special interest for risk assessment, were also included in the food frequency questionnaire.

12. In response to an enquiry from members as to whether a separate food consumption survey targeting students and younger age groups would be conducted, the Administration advised that CFS had conducted a food consumption survey for secondary school students in 2000, and would consider conducting another survey for younger age groups after the completion of the Second FCS.

Latest development

13. The Administration will report to the Panel the findings of the Second FCS at the meeting on 13 July 2021.

Relevant papers

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

**Relevant papers on
Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	8.5.2018 (Item VI)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	2.8.2018*	Administration's supplementary information on the Second FCS (LC Paper No. <u>CB(2)1905/17-18(01))</u>

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