CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO INITIAL WRITTEN QUESTION

Head: 49 Food and Environmental   Subhead (No. & title):
         Hygiene Department

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

(a)   In respect of the work on "ensuring pre-packaged food for sale is properly labelled", please advise on the quantities of imported and locally produced pre-packaged food products, methods of label checking of such products, as well as the manpower and expenditure involved for 2011-12.

(b)   Regarding the indicator for labels checked by the Department, the actual number for the current year is 55 180.   Please advise on the types of food products subjected to label checking in the same year. Please also advise on the types and quantities of food products in non-compliant cases of labelling in the previous year.

(c)   Please advise on the details of the Department's effort to "continue to strengthen the promotional activities on nutrition labelling", and the expenditure involved.

Asked by: Hon. FANG Kang, Vincent

Reply:

(a)   According to the surveys conducted by an independent consultant commissioned by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) from October 2009 to January 2010 and in March 2010, it was estimated that there were a total of 73 000 prepackaged food products, including both imported and locally produced ones, in the market that would be regulated by the Nutrition Labelling Scheme.

All prepackaged foods in Hong Kong must comply with the general food labelling[1] and nutrition labelling requirements[2] as laid down in the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W).   CFS conducts visual inspection and chemical analysis to ascertain whether the labels comply with the relevant requirements.   A team of 12 persons consisting of health inspectors and supporting staff is responsible for inspections and enforcement actions in respect of the relevant labelling requirements in 2011-12. The total annual salary of the 12 posts for 2011-12 is about $ 5.24 million.

(b)   In 2011, 55 180 prepackaged food products were checked.   They included bakery and cereal products (6 282), snacks (6 494), dairy products (6 297), drinks (6 444), aquatic products (5 910), meat products (6 095), prepackaged fruits and vegetables (5 891), sauces (6 265) and others (5 502).

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[1]   In terms of general food labelling, prepackaged foods are required to be legibly marked or labelled with the following information in either English or Chinese language or in both languages, namely:(i) name of food, (ii) list of ingredients including allergen declaration, (iii) indication of "best before" or "use by" date, (iv) statement of special condition for storage or instructions for use, (v) name and address of manufacturer or packer, and (vi) count, weight or volume.

[2]   In terms of nutrition labelling, the Nutrition Labelling Scheme requires all prepackaged foods to label the content of energy plus seven nutrients, namely: (i) protein, (ii) carbohydrates, (iii) total fat, (iv) saturated fat, (v) trans fat, (vi) sodium and (vii) sugars, as well as any nutrient for which a claim is made, and regulates nutrition claims.

In 2010, there were 162 non-compliant cases (including 66 cases in breach of the general labelling and 96 cases in breach of the nutrition labelling requirements) covering food items consisting of sauces (15), drinks (16), snacks (36), bakery and cereal products (19) and others (76).

(c) Since the passage of the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment: Requirements for Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claim) Regulation 2008 by the Legislative Council in mid-2008, CFS had launched a three-year Publicity and Education Campaign on promoting nutrition labelling, implemented in three phases :

(1) to raise public awareness in Phase I (June 2008 – July 2009);

(2) to enhance understanding in Phase II (August 2009 – June 2010); and

(3) to motivate behavioural changes in Phase III (July 2010 – June 2011).

To sustain the efforts, CFS has launched another two-year enhanced education and publicity programme on nutrition labelling since July 2011. CFS will continue to work with the education sector and community organisations in promoting the use of nutrition information on the labels among the general public and students through the following programmes -

(i) during the academic year 2010/11, CFS and the Education Bureau jointly organised the "Live it, Use it" Nutrition Labelling Promotion Award Scheme (the Award Scheme). Under the Award Scheme, a total of 35 teams from 21 secondary schools involving 256 students took part in various creative activities. An award presentation ceremony cum Food Safety Day was held in July 2011. The Award Scheme for the academic year 2011/12 has started since September 2011; and

(ii) building on the model of the Award Scheme, another scheme targeting at users of community organisations service, namely the "Live it, Use it" Nutrition Labelling Fun Shopping Award Scheme, supported by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, has been launched since December 2011.

To promote the wider application of the nutrition information in our daily life, CFS has also launched a mobile application "Nutrition Calculator" ("NuCal") in October 2011. With "NuCal", one can set up a personal database on food items for recording nutrition information of their favourite prepackaged food items. The estimated level of nutrient intake can be worked out by inputting the amount of food consumed. Users may then compare it with the upper limit of the daily intake and make necessary adjustments as appropriate. As at 15 February 2012, "NuCal" had recorded about 28 000 downloads.

The above promotion work is undertaken by existing staff and the expenditure cannot be separately identified.

Signature	
Name in block letters	Clement LEUNG
Post Title	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Date	1.3.2012

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