

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**FHB(FE)116**

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Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

Regarding the indicator “vehicles carrying poultry inspected at Man Kam To” under paragraph 4, the number for 2015 (Estimate) is 1 998, representing a decrease of 14% against 2013. Moreover, the number of “samples taken from imported live poultry for testing of avian influenza (AI)” for 2015 (Estimate) is 47 196, representing a decrease of 27.8% against 2013. (The comparison is made with the figures of 2013 instead of 2014 because import of live poultry from the Mainland was temporarily suspended for 8.5 months in 2014.) As such, please advise on the following:

- (1) the reason(s) for the substantial decrease in the number of vehicles to be inspected and the number of samples to be taken under 2015 (Estimate); given the note’s explanation that “the number of samples to be collected in 2015 is estimated according to the sample collection plan devised on a risk-based assessment” (page 245), what the said risk-based assessment refers to, what assessment criteria are adopted, and the reason(s) for the corresponding decrease in the number of vehicles carrying poultry inspected; whether the estimated number of live poultry imported from the Mainland will be further reduced; whether the vehicles carrying day-old chicks from the Mainland to the farms in Hong Kong are required to be inspected; and whether samples from these day-old chicks are required to be taken for testing AI; and
- (2) the basis in support of the introduction of serological tests as explained in the second note on page 245 and whether the testing is applied to all live poultry reared locally and on the Mainland, or just to live poultry imported from the Mainland (if the latter is the case, the reason(s)); whether the Department has liaised with the respective animal quarantine authorities of major live poultry exporting areas on the Mainland to reach a consensus on the testing arrangement (if not, whether such tests are unilaterally introduced by Hong Kong); and whether relevant serological testing method on live poultry is also introduced in other countries and regions where live poultry rearing is practised (if yes, the countries involved).

Asked by: Hon FANG Kang, Vincent (Member Question No. 12)

Reply:

1. To strengthen early warning against avian influenza (AI) infection in imported live poultry, the Government has since April 2013 introduced the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests for H7 AI, and since January 2014 introduced the H7 serological tests on top of the then existing tests for H5 AI. Each sample collected might be used for both the H5 and H7 tests. Therefore, the number of samples collected does not directly translate into the number of tests conducted. The sampling plan might be subject to adjustment in the course of time according to the prevailing risk of AI and based on scientific assessment.

Supply of live poultry from the Mainland (suspended since January 2014 when a number of samples tested positive to AI PCR testing on 27 January 2014) resumed on 4 September 2014. The estimates about the number of samples collected for testing of AI and the number of vehicles carrying poultry inspected at Man Kam To for 2015 are made on the basis of actual figures obtaining in the last four months of 2014 (i.e. between 4 September to 31 December 2014) duly adjusted to take into account the prevailing scientific risk assessment on AI.

Currently, day-old chicks supplied to Hong Kong have to come from registered day-old chicks producing farms in the Mainland. These farms are subject to the highest biosecurity and diseases control measures amongst all registered poultry farms. There is no evidence to indicate that the viruses are able to transmit from an infected hen to the embryos. More importantly, AI viruses, both highly pathogenic (HP) AI and lowly pathogenic (LP) AI, are generally embryo lethal. In other words, infected eggs would most likely not hatch in the hatchery of the registered farm. Given that the hens have been tested for AI and the eggs have been in the incubator in the registered farms for 21 days, it is most likely that infection, if any, should have already been detected in the hens before the export of the day-old chicks takes place. Moreover, day-old chicks will have only a very limited chance of exposure to AI virus after hatching and are, therefore, less likely to be infected than older birds. Therefore, the risk of day-old chicks carrying AI viruses is very low. On the basis of scientific risk-based assessment, we do not require sampling AI testing for day-old chicks upon importation into Hong Kong. Having taken similar and other relevant factors into account, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) currently has not recommended testing for day-old chicks.

2. Serological test serves as a surveillance measure on birds or farms to detect and determine if they have been infected with AI in the past. Currently, serological testing is applied to all live poultry reared locally and imported from the Mainland. For imported live poultry, serological tests are conducted in accordance with the consensus on specific testing and sampling methods reached between the relevant Mainland authorities and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. Serological test is the standard method of the OIE.