

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-FHB(FE)07

(Question Serial No. S0017)

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:

1. In the reply under serial number FHB(FE)093, it is stated that no sample of imported Japanese food was detected with unsatisfactory radiation level in the past three years. However, the absence of unsatisfactory test results does not imply that no radiation-contaminated food can be imported from Japan. Please advise whether the Department will adopt more stringent standards for the testing of radiation levels; if yes, whether other Japanese prefectures will be prohibited from importing food into Hong Kong, rendering our food safety standards on a par with those of China, the United States and South Korea; if not, the reason(s). Please also advise whether the Department will lower the detection limits for radioactive substances in food; if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon KWOK Wai-keung (Member Question No.)

Reply:

In the wake of Fukushima nuclear power plant incident in Japan in 2011, individual countries and regions have implemented food control measures deemed fit to the local circumstances and risk assessment results. As far as Hong Kong is concerned, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) issued an order under Section 78B of the then Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) to prohibit the import of all fruits and vegetables, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from the five most affected prefectures of Japan, namely Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma, with effect from 24 March 2011. Under the order, all chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, poultry eggs and live, chilled or frozen aquatic products from these five prefectures may be imported into Hong Kong only if accompanied by a certificate issued by competent authority of Japan certifying that the radiation levels do not exceed the guideline levels laid

down by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex)¹ which are internationally accepted standards for protection of public health and global trade. The Expert Committee on Food Safety set up under the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) considered the adoption of the Codex guideline levels appropriate in addressing food safety concerns over food imported from Japan. Since DFEH imposed the import restrictions on Japanese food, CFS has tested around 320 000 samples of Japanese food and the testing outcomes were all satisfactory. The surveillance results have been uploaded onto CFS' website every working day.

In light of the above, there is no scientific justification for tightening up the prevailing standard for testing of radioactivity in Japanese food. That said, we will continue to review the control measures on the import of Japanese food in the light of changing circumstances. The factors being taken into account include the assessments made by international organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the control measures adopted by other jurisdictions, local food surveillance results, the Japanese authorities' progress in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear power plant incident and other relevant considerations. On the whole, food safety is our prime concern. At the same time, we should keep in view the latest developments of the aforesaid factors and the need to fulfill the requirements of the World Trade Organisation.

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¹ Codex Alimentarius Commission is an international body established in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation to develop food standards and guidelines for protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair trade practices in the food trade.