

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)317

(Question Serial No. 4263)

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:

With regard to food surveillance, please provide information on the following:

- (a) the financial provision and manpower for food surveillance by the Centre for Food Safety in 2017-18;
- (b) the total number of food samples taken for testing in various projects under the Food Surveillance Programme in 2016-17 (including routine food surveillance, targeted food surveillance and seasonal food surveillance) and the satisfactory rates;
- (c) the work progress regarding continued study on the regulation of cooked meat as mentioned under Programme (1); and
- (d) given that the Department will follow up proposals to introduce a pre-market safety assessment scheme for genetically modified food as mentioned under Programme (1), the details of the scheme and its progress.

Asked by: Hon HO Chun-yin, Steven (Member Question No. 36)

Reply:

The information sought is provided as follows-

- (a) The Food Import and Export Section and the Food Surveillance and Complaint Section of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) are responsible for carrying out food surveillance work, including collection of food samples for testing at the import, wholesale and retail levels. With an estimated establishment of 376 staff members in 2017-18, the estimated expenditure of the 2 Sections in 2017-18 is about \$255 million. Apart from food surveillance, both Sections are involved in other duties. There is no separate breakdown on the expenditures incurred by the 2 Sections on food surveillance. The current manpower and resources are able to meet the operational requirements.

- (b) The statistics on food surveillance are kept on a calendar year basis. About 59 200, 4 900 and 1 300 food samples were taken for testing under the routine food surveillance, targeted food surveillance and seasonal food surveillance respectively in 2016. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.8%.
- (c) The Government will continue to study the regulation of cooked meat, including looking into international practices. Also, the Government will continue to monitor the safety of meat products, conduct risk assessment on the safety of cooked meat, and take samples for testing in 2017.

In 2016, the CFS has taken 851 samples of meat products (including dried meat, meat sausage, Chinese sausage, red sausage, meatball, shredded meat, ham, bacon, BBQ pork, luncheon meat, etc.) for testing. Test results were satisfactory except 2 pre-packaged cold cut samples and 1 roasted pork sample which were found to be contaminated with pathogens.

- (d) According to the World Health Organisation, genetically modified (GM) food currently available on the international market has passed the safety assessments of the respective food safety regulatory authorities and is not likely to be harmful to human health.

GM food is treated like any other food and is covered in the regular Food Surveillance Programme of CFS. The CFS takes food samples at the import, wholesale and retail (including online retailers) levels and adopts a risk-based principle in determining the types of samples to be collected, the frequency and number of samples taken for testing, and types of laboratory analysis to be conducted. The CFS releases the test results to the public through various channels.

The CFS has issued the “Guidelines on Voluntary Labelling of Genetically Modified Food” which sets out the principles underlying recommended labelling approaches for GM food, and provides reference for the trade to make truthful and informative labels in a consumer-friendly manner. The CFS will continue to promote the voluntary labelling regime to traders, provide the public with information on GM food and address food safety issues related to GM food, while keeping in view international development in GM technology and GM food labelling standards.

The Government has been considering introducing a mandatory pre-market safety assessment scheme, with a view to providing additional safeguard to consumers on GM food being sold in Hong Kong. In this regard, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the CFS/FEHD have been keeping in view international developments on the regulation of GM foods and the local circumstances with a view to coming up with a proposal for public consultation. We need more time to formulate the proposal, and are not ready to come up with an estimated timetable for the public consultation exercise at this stage. The aforementioned preparatory work has been and will continue to be undertaken by the existing manpower and resources in FHB and CFS/FEHD.