

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)090

(Question Serial No. 0238)

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:

In 2020-21, the Department will follow up proactively on the recommendations in the Audit Reports released in November 2018 and the Public Accounts Committee reports concerned to strengthen the functions of the Centre for Food Safety in food safety management and food import control.

- 1) Please provide the details, including the specific measures, progress, implementation timetable, and manpower and expenditure required, and assess the effectiveness achieved in the previous year.
- 2) As regards food import control, how many Asian areas are currently subject to a ban by the Government on food imports to Hong Kong? What is/are the reason(s)? Will assessments be made in the future to lift the import ban on certain places? If yes, what are the details and the expenditure involved? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?

Asked by: Hon CHEUNG Yu-yan, Tommy (LegCo internal reference no.: 33)

Reply:

- 1) In 2019, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department set up a task group led by the Controller, CFS, to take forward the recommendations of the Audit Commission (Audit) and the Legislative Council (LegCo) Public Accounts Committee (PAC) concerning its work of food safety management and import control. The task group has completed its comprehensive reviews on CFS's operational manuals and guidelines, staff management and supervision arrangements, training requirements, and manpower and resource requirements. CFS has rolled out concrete and effective short, medium and long-term measures to enhance its effectiveness by phases, including updating its guidelines where there were inadequacies or ambiguities and introducing a mechanism for regular updates, enhancing training and supervision of frontline staff, strengthening staff's law enforcement mindset and the keeping of data and records. The specific

measures taken and their implementation were set out in the Government minutes submitted to LegCo in May and December 2019.

In addition, CFS set up a dedicated team in end 2017 to look closely at its operational workflow, revamp its information technology (IT) systems for higher efficiency, and enhance its mode of operation through IT to support the work of its frontline staff and reinforce its capability in food import control, surveillance, incident management, risk assessment and traceability. CFS also launched the Food Trader Portal (FTP) in stages at the end of 2019 as a platform for electronic communication with the trade. Through the FTP, food traders can complete registration as importers or distributors by electronic means. In the first quarter of 2020, CFS further introduced an online service to facilitate food traders to apply online for import licences and import permission in respect of meat, poultry and game.

In 2020-21, CFS will continue to implement specific measures to follow up on the recommendations of Audit and PAC and enhance its IT systems in an order of priorities. The estimated expenditure of CFS in 2020-21 is about \$49 million more than the revised estimate for 2019-20. This includes the expenditure incurred for the creation of 15 additional civil service posts to enhance the safeguard of food safety.

- 2) As regards food import control, the Government's prime consideration is to ensure that foods available for sale in Hong Kong are safe and fit for human consumption. CFS will monitor local and overseas food safety alerts and food incidents and prohibit the import of certain foods to Hong Kong if so warranted by risk assessment. Following the leakage of radioactive substances at the Fukushima nuclear power plants after the Great East Japan Earthquake in Japan on 11 March 2011, CFS immediately stepped up surveillance on radiation levels of food products imported from Japan. On 24 March 2011, an order was issued under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) to prohibit the import of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma. CFS has been reviewing the risk management measures on food products imported from Japan in light of the latest situation. The factors taken into account include local surveillance results, assessments made by international expert organisations, surveillance results of the Japanese Government, the latest position of import control on Japanese food by other economies, consistency of the control measures with the World Trade Organization's requirements and public concern. Having carefully considered all relevant factors, CFS allowed the import of vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma into Hong Kong with conditions on 24 July 2018. It will continue to review the existing food bans under the above mechanism. As the officers responsible for the above work also undertake other duties, the manpower and expenditure for this aspect of work cannot be separately quantified.

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