

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**FHB(FE)176**

**(Question Serial No. 4557)**

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:

Will the Government inform the Committee:

- (1) of the respective numbers and percentages of vegetable importers, wholesalers and retailers engaging in the trading of directly distributed vegetables in each of the past 5 years?
- (2) of the respective quantities and percentages of directly distributed vegetables among the various kinds of vegetables imported to Hong Kong (including winter vegetables, summer vegetables, leafy vegetables, gourds, fruits, roots and rhizomes, beans, herbs, mushrooms and others) in each of the past 5 years?
- (3) of (i) the number of vegetable samples taken by the Department for inspection and testing, (ii) the number of unsatisfactory samples (as well as the reasons for the unsatisfactory results), and (iii) the number of cases of poisoning due to consumption of vegetables with excessive pesticide residues, and among them, the respective numbers related to directly distributed vegetables and their percentages in the relevant totals, in each of the past 5 years?
- (4) whether the Department has assessed if directly distributed vegetables are suitable for consumption; if yes, the details; if no, the reason(s). What are the measures in place to address public concerns over the safety of consumption of directly distributed vegetables?
- (5) whether the Department has studied if the prevalence of directly distributed vegetables in the market reveals that there are loopholes in the Food Surveillance Programme (FSP)? If it has done so and the outcome is in the affirmative, will the Department take measures to include directly distributed vegetables in the FSP, such as requiring that all vegetables supplied from the Mainland to Hong Kong must be distributed through the Vegetable Marketing Organization? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?

Asked by: Hon KWOK Ka-ki (LegCo internal reference no.: 138)

Reply:

Imported vegetables are distributed through wholesale markets (including the wholesale markets operated by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Cheung Sha Wan Vegetable Wholesale Market of the Vegetable Marketing Organisation (VMO) or other private wholesalers) or sold directly at retail outlets (direct sale). According to the information from the Census and Statistics Department, there were about 860 000 tonnes of imported vegetables in 2019. As informed by AFCD, about 340 000 tonnes of vegetables were transacted through the wholesale markets operated by AFCD and VMO in the year.

Whether vegetables are distributed through wholesalers is unrelated to safeguarding of food safety. Wholesale markets primarily provide a trading platform for importers and retailers to facilitate business. All vegetables sold in Hong Kong for human consumption, whether or not they are distributed through the wholesale markets operated by AFCD or VMO, are subject to the local food safety regulatory mechanism. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department takes samples of vegetables at the import, wholesale and retail levels having regard to the risk-based principle under its Food Surveillance Programme to ensure food safety, regardless of whether the vegetables are distributed through wholesalers or are for direct sale. From 2015 to 2019, CFS collected 118 278 samples of vegetables and related products for testing. The number of samples tested and the number of unsatisfactory samples, with a breakdown by year, are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number of samples tested</b>	24 537	24 462	23 677	23 952	21 650	118 278
<b>Number of unsatisfactory samples</b>	97	65	26	44	31	263

The unsatisfactory samples were separately detected to have pesticide residues, preservatives or metallic contamination exceeding the statutory limits. There was no food poisoning case caused by consuming foods with excessive pesticide residues in the past 5 years.

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