CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 0767)

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 (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

Regarding food surveillance on imported Japanese food by the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, please advise this Committee of:

(1) the types and total quantity of food tested and the proportion of tested samples to the total quantity of food imported from Japan in the past 3 years;
(2) the expenditure and staff establishment involved; and
(3) the average time taken for carrying out the surveillance. Will the Department consider increasing manpower to expedite the process?

Asked by: Hon CHEUNG Yu-yan, Tommy (LegCo internal reference no.: 1)

Reply:

(1) The types and total quantities of imported Japanese food tested for radiation in the past 3 years are tabulated below:

Type of food	Total number of samples of imported Japanese food tested for radiation		
	2021	2022	2023
Live, chilled or frozen aquatic products	3 213	4 002	16 408
Chilled or frozen game, meat, poultry and poultry eggs	190	689	1 093
Fruits	160	99	1 230
Vegetables	179	244	915
Milk, milk beverages and milk powder/dried milk	12	4	237
Frozen confections	114	119	108
Drinks and others	5 584	5 743	22 169
Total:	9 452	10 900	42 160

In response to the Japanese Government's unilateral decision to discharge nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power station into the sea, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has, since mid-June 2023, expanded the scope of testing of radiation levels of imported Japanese food to cover all aquatic products imported from Japan, which will only be allowed to be supplied in the market after confirmation that the testing results are satisfactory. As for other types of food, and live, chilled or frozen aquatic products imported from Japan before mid-June 2023, as CFS does not keep records of the quantities of all food imported from Japan or their breakdowns, the proportion of food samples tested for radiation to the total quantity of food imported from Japan cannot be calculated.

(2) The majority of staff responsible for radiation monitoring of imported Japanese food are also tasked with other import control work. CFS does not have a breakdown of the manpower deployed for radiation monitoring of imported Japanese food. The manpower for the aforementioned work and the expenditure in the past 3 years are set out below:

Year	Manpower (number of staff)	Expenditure ($ million)
2021-22	94	49.86
2022-23	102	58.13
2023-24 (revised estimate)	102	63.34

(3) To increase manpower to cope with the testing work of imported Japanese food flexibly, CFS employed 8 non-civil service contract staff for its Radiological Monitoring Team in 2023-24 in support of its work on radiation monitoring of imported Japanese food.

After the stepped up radiation testing, the time required for testing for most imported Japanese aquatic products is essentially the same as it has been in the past. Generally, the whole clearance process, including testing, can be completed within 3 to 4 hours. The duration of the entire clearance process depends on many factors, such as clarity and completeness of the related documents or information, the number of imported consignments, and whether multiple consignments of goods arrive at the same time and need to be queued for inspection. CFS will continue to keep in view of the situation and make suitable manpower deployment to meet operational needs.

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