

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**EEB(F)113**

**(Question Serial No. 1696)**

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

It is listed under Indicators that the numbers of applications for new food business licences and for new restricted food permits have been on the decline. In this connection, please advise this Committee of the following:

- a) What is/are the reason(s) for the continuous decline in the number of applications for the aforesaid licences?
- b) What are the respective numbers of applications for such licences in the past 5 years?
- c) It is stated that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will streamline the food licensing regime this year. What are the specific measures to be taken by the Department? What is the implementation timetable?

Asked by: Hon LUK Hon-man, Benson (LegCo internal reference no.: 29)

Reply:

- a) The numbers of new applications for food business licences and restricted food permits depend on the respective commercial considerations of food business operators. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has not carried out any relevant studies. The estimate for 2024 is made on the basis of the past trend.
- b) The respective numbers of applications for such licences in the past 5 years are listed below:

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Number of applications for food business licences	4 062	4 363	4 920	3 740	3 238
Number of applications for restricted food permits	1 328	2 182	3 601	2 247	2 133

- c) The Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that the Department would roll out progressively a number of initiatives to streamline the licensing regime of food businesses from the first quarter of this year. The latest developments are as follow:

- (i) “Professional Certification System”  
Since February 2024, the scope of the Professional Certification System, which adopts a “licence first, inspection later” approach, has been expanded from light refreshment restaurant and food factory licences to cover general restaurant licences, expediting the approval and enabling applicants to have a better grasp of the processing time.
- (ii) “Composite permit”  
A proposal for amending the relevant legislation will be submitted to the Legislative Council within 2024 to introduce a “composite permit” that covers multiple restricted food items to obviate the need for separate applications for each item, thereby facilitating business operation.
- (iii) Facilitating the sale of homegrown produce cooked with simple methods by farms engaged in commercial agricultural production  
In the first half of 2024, more lenient licensing requirements will be set for farms engaged in commercial agricultural production to sell their homegrown produce cooked with simple methods, with a view to promoting the development of leisure farming.
- (iv) Issuing e-licences for food business  
In the first half of 2024, e-licences will be introduced for all food business and more information on the application status will be provided to the applicants through the “Licence Application Tracking Facility” to increase transparency of the vetting process.
- (v) “DIY application for food business licences”  
In March 2024, a concise instructional animation titled “DIY application for food business licences”, which was produced from the users’ angle, was published to enable applicants to gain an easy understanding of the licence application process so that start-up costs of micro, small and medium enterprises can be reduced.

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