

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

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(Question Serial No. 0036)

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:

During 2024-25, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will continue to re-engineer the workflow, and revamp and develop new information technology systems for the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) for more effective management of data in food import and food safety incidents. In this connection, please advise this Committee of:

1. the details and progress of the relevant work, and the anticipated results; and
2. whether CFS's staff establishment and deployment will be affected; if yes, the details.

Asked by: Hon SHIU Ka-fai (LegCo internal reference no.: 9)

Reply:

1. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department set up a dedicated team at the end of 2017 to fully review its operational workflow, with a view to revamping existing information technology (IT) systems and developing new ones based on the re-engineered operational workflow for higher efficiency. The details of the relevant work and results are as follows:

Launched in phases beginning at the end of 2019, the Food Trader Portal (FTP) has become a platform for electronic communication between CFS and the trade. The import-related functions of the FTP were fully implemented in May 2021, putting into practice the use of IT to facilitate the trade and strengthen import control of the food concerned. Food importers or distributors can make use of the online platform to apply for and renew their import licences or import permissions for meat, poultry, game, eggs, milk and frozen confections, and report arrivals of consignments of foods under import control. The applicants are no longer required to send their staff to CFS to deal with these matters in person. Through access to the online system, they can also check their application status and records of past applications. Likewise, applications for import licences for import of meat and poultry by air and chilled meat and poultry by land can also be made online. The time required for processing such applications can be shortened to a few hours in general. Currently, more than 95% of import licences and import permissions are applied for and issued through the FTP.

In March 2022, CFS launched a new Food Incident Management System, which strengthens its effectiveness in recording and tracing the actions taken in food incidents and enhances its monitoring of the progress of follow-up actions. In November 2022, CFS launched a new Food Import and Export Control System to support the workflow of import and export control and the issue of supporting documents for import and export of food. The system is equipped with automated functions, including verification of the information declared in applications for import licences, random selection of food consignments for physical inspection, and verification of the information about arrival of food consignments in Hong Kong.

In January 2023, CFS finished revamping the Food Surveillance System, which helps increase its capability in food surveillance. In December 2023, CFS further enhanced the functions of the FTP so that food manufacturers can apply for Recommendation on Food Manufacturer Registration via the FTP for export of the specified 18 categories of food products to the Mainland, which facilitates their registration with the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, CFS finished its work on the interface of the above systems, which enables the systems to form a complete information network to better support CFS's daily operations through data sharing, thereby enhancing CFS's capability in food import control, surveillance and traceability.

CFS is developing the Food Import Protocol Management System, to which the regulatory authorities of exporting countries/places can directly upload the documents and information required for import to Hong Kong, thereby further optimising CFS's work relating to food import control. The above system is expected to be completed within 2025.

2. The revamp and development of IT systems can facilitate the trade in making various applications and in fee payments. It also reinforces CFS's capability in surveillance and incident management. The dedicated team in charge of the above work will have 50 staff at an estimated staffing expenditure of about \$51.69 million in 2024-25. The above work will not directly affect the staff establishment and deployment for other duties of CFS (e.g. food surveillance).

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