

Food Safety, Environmental Hygiene, Agriculture and Fisheries

With over 90 per cent of its food imported, Hong Kong adopts a wide range of measures to safeguard food safety. The Government is also committed to maintaining a clean and hygienic living environment to protect public health.

Organisational Framework

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) is responsible for drawing up policies (and allocating resources for their implementation) on food safety, environmental hygiene, animal health, agriculture and fisheries in Hong Kong. It works closely with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Government Laboratory (GL).

The FEHD ensures that food sold in Hong Kong is safe and fit for consumption and that a clean and hygienic living environment is maintained for the people of Hong Kong.

The AFCD implements policies governing the agricultural and fisheries industries and provides them with infrastructural and technical support such as market facilities and animal disease diagnostic services. The department also administers loans to them and advises the Government on animal health matters.

The GL provides testing services to support the regular food surveillance programme of the FEHD's Centre for Food Safety (CFS) and assists the CFS in handling food incidents.

Public Cleansing Services

The FEHD provides services for street cleansing, household waste collection and public toilets. All streets are swept between one and eight times a day, depending on their condition. For main thoroughfares, flyovers and high-speed roads, mechanised cleansing is provided. In 2012, about 77 per cent of street cleansing services were outsourced. The FEHD and its contractors provide regular washing and flushing services for heavily used pavements, hawker blackspots and market areas. Additional cleansing services are provided where necessary to maintain environmental cleanliness and hygiene.

Household waste is collected all year round. In 2012, about 73 per cent of waste collection services were outsourced and about 5,280 tonnes of household waste were collected daily by the FEHD and its contractors.

The FEHD provides toilet attendants at heavily used public toilets. In 2012, about 38 per cent of public toilets were serviced by toilet attendants. Six public toilets and two aqua privies were refurbished while 40 aqua privies were converted to flushing toilets in an ongoing drive to improve such facilities.

The FEHD takes enforcement action against littering, spitting, and other unhygienic practices in public places. In 2012, the FEHD issued some 35,500 fixed penalty notices.

Abatement of Sanitary Nuisances

In 2012, the FEHD issued 4,340 Nuisance Notices requiring those responsible to stop sanitary nuisances such as refuse accumulation, water dripping from air-conditioners and water seepage in private premises, and instituted 70 prosecutions against those who failed to comply with the notices.

Pest Control

Preventing the spread of pest-borne diseases is one of FEHD's prime tasks. The department reviews constantly the methodology and strategy for controlling the spread of pests. Campaigns are carried out across Hong Kong annually to urge people to help stop the spread of rodents and mosquitoes. The department maintains close surveillance of *Aedes albopictus*, a major carrier of dengue fever in Hong Kong. Anti-mosquito teams conducted about 778,000 inspections of likely mosquito breeding spots and eliminated about 41,700 mosquito breeding places during the year.

Cemeteries and Crematoria

The FEHD operates six government crematoria, 11 public cemeteries and eight public columbaria, and monitors the management of 28 private cemeteries.

The FEHD actively promotes environmentally friendly and sustainable ways of handling ashes and alternative ways of paying tribute to the deceased. The Government encourages scattering of ashes in the FEHD's 10 Gardens of Remembrance. The FEHD provides a free ferry service for scattering ashes at sea and has employed a bigger vessel since January 2012 to meet increasing demand for the service. The FEHD also provides an Internet Memorial Service for the public to pay homage to the deceased (www.memorial.gov.hk), accessible through the mobile phone (m.memorial.gov.hk).

Columbaria

A new columbarium with 43,000 niches at Wo Hop Shek Cemetery was completed in July 2012.

Of 24 sites in the 18 districts identified for columbarium development, the Diamond Hill Columbarium extension (offering about 1,500 niches) was completed in April 2012 and the Cheung Chau Cemetery extension (offering about 1,000 niches) is scheduled for completion in 2013. Detailed design and site investigation works for columbarium development at the Sandy Ridge Cemetery (expected to provide 200,000 niches by batches starting in 2022) will start in 2013.

Following two rounds of public consultation in 2010 and 2011, the Government aims to introduce a Bill into the Legislative Council in 2013 to enhance the regulation of private columbaria.

Licensing of Food Premises and Other Trades

The FEHD is the licensing authority for food businesses. It issues permits for the sale of restricted foods (including Chinese herbal tea, milk, frozen confections, sushi and sashimi) and licences for places of public entertainment (such as theatres, cinemas and entertainment machine centres). The department also licenses private swimming pools, commercial bathhouses and factories engaged in offensive trades. The FEHD provides executive and secretarial support to the Liquor Licensing Board, an independent statutory body that issues liquor licences, including those for clubs.

During 2012, the FEHD issued 6,523 full and provisional food business licences, 742 permits for restricted foods, 1,557 licences for places of public entertainment, 21 licences for other trades, 907 liquor and club liquor licences, and 11 permits for karaoke establishments in premises with restaurant licences.

In September 2012, the FEHD further shortened the time to process applications for live broadcasts in licensed cinemas from eight working days to four.

Food Safety and Labelling

The FEHD's Centre for Food Safety (CFS) is responsible for ensuring that food sold in Hong Kong is safe and fit for consumption. About 65,000 samples of food were taken at import, wholesale and retail points in 2012 for chemical, microbiological and radiological testing. The overall satisfaction rate of these tests was 99.8 per cent.

During 2012, about 28,900 vehicles carrying vegetables, and about 42,700 vehicles carrying live food animals including pigs, cattle, goats and poultry were inspected at the Food Control Office and Animal Inspection Station at Man Kam To, and about 5,115,900 live food animals were examined and about 48,500 blood and 58,300 urine, faecal and tissue samples were tested for zoonotic disease and veterinary drug residues.

The Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation was passed by the Legislative Council in June 2012 and will come into operation on 1 August 2014.

In November 2012, the Government embarked on a two-month public consultation exercise on legislative proposals relating to formula products and foods intended for infants and young

children under the age of 36 months. Subject to the views received, the Government plans to introduce the relevant legislation in 2013.

The nutrition labelling scheme requires pre-packaged foods, unless exempted, to carry labels that provide information about energy and specified nutrients, and also specifies the conditions for making nutrition claims. The scheme assists consumers to make informed food choices, regulates misleading or deceptive labels and nutrition claims, and encourages food manufacturers to apply sound nutrition principles in the formulation of foods. In 2012, the CFS conducted visual checks on 5,277 pre-packaged food products to ensure that they complied with the statutory '1+7' nutrition-labelling requirements and took 519 food samples for chemical analysis to verify the nutrition information and nutrition claims. The overall compliance rate was 98.62 per cent.

The Food Safety Ordinance came into full operation on 1 February 2012. It introduces a food-tracing mechanism consisting of a registration scheme for food importers and food distributors, and a requirement for food traders to maintain proper transaction records to enhance food traceability.

Measures against Avian Influenza

Hong Kong's measures to keep avian influenza at bay include stringent monitoring of farms and markets, vaccination of chickens and close surveillance of imported and local birds in Hong Kong.

Under an agreement with the Mainland, all poultry (except pigeons) imported from there must be vaccinated against H5 avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu. All live poultry consignments entering Hong Kong must be tested negative for avian influenza before being released for sale. Government veterinarians also visit registered Mainland farms to ensure the food safety of imported poultry.

Keeping chickens, ducks, geese, pigeons, quails and other poultry in backyards is prohibited. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$100,000. Owners of racing pigeons are required to have exhibition licences. Pet bird traders are required to submit to the health authorities official health certificates, or documents such as invoices showing the places of origin of their birds, or the names and addresses of their suppliers. Sale of birds from unknown sources is prohibited. Bird traders must also keep up-to-date records of their transactions and the number of birds in their possession.

All poultry in public market stalls and fresh provision shops must be slaughtered by 8 pm every day and live poultry are not allowed in these premises between 8 pm and 5 am the next day. Live poultry retailers must ensure that people working in retail outlets wear protective clothing and report immediately to the FEHD any dead poultry found. They must not overstock live poultry on their premises and must affix acrylic panels to their poultry cages to prevent direct contact between customers and the poultry. They are also responsible for preventing customers from touching live poultry.

To monitor avian influenza efficiently, blood samples and/or faecal swabs are collected regularly for testing from poultry farms, wholesale and retail markets, from healthy, sick or dead birds, and from birds kept in recreation parks, pet shops, and wild birds in wetlands and elsewhere. The Government also provides a round-the-clock service for collecting sick and dead wild birds. In 2012, 21 of some 15,100 wild bird carcasses received by the AFCD were confirmed to be H5-infected. A quick, real-time method of testing samples for avian influenza, known as Polymerase Chain Reaction, is used in Hong Kong.

Long-term precautionary measures require poultry farms to keep proper farm management records, enhance cleaning and disinfection facilities, segregate the functions relating to the rearing of breeder flocks and broiler flocks, and install metal nets to prevent small birds from entering farm sheds. In 2012, there were 30 chicken farms in Hong Kong with a total maximum rearing capacity of 1.3 million birds.

The AFCD runs a training programme for staff that carry out poultry culling and conducts culling drills annually.

During the year, the Government temporarily suspended the importation of chilled or frozen poultry meat and poultry products from a number of overseas places with avian influenza outbreaks.

In July 2012, H5N1 virus was detected on a swab sample collected from a bird cage holding an Oriental magpie robin at a pet bird shop in the Yuen Po Street Bird Garden in Mong Kok. The AFCD closed the shop and removed all the birds for disposal and the bird garden was closed for 21 days.

Monitoring of Influenza Virus in Pigs

The AFCD monitors closely the health of pigs in Hong Kong and reminds local pig farmers regularly to maintain good farm and personal hygiene. The FEHD also examines imported live pigs and constantly reminds slaughterhouse staff and others who have physical contact with live pigs in slaughterhouses to wear masks and other protective gear and to receive influenza vaccination. CFS literature on food safety includes advice on the handling and cooking of food, particularly pork.

Public Markets and Cooked Food Markets

The FEHD operates 102 public markets, including 25 free-standing cooked food markets, that provide some 14,400 stalls selling fresh and cooked food and household items. As at the end of 2012, the occupancy rate at these markets was 89.5 per cent.

Hawkers

The FEHD regulates hawking in Hong Kong. As at the end of 2012, there were 6,269 hawkers carrying out business in licensed fixed-pitch stalls and 470 itinerant hawkers.

Following a fire in Fa Yuen Street in 2011, the FEHD introduced a number of measures to reduce fire risks in fixed-pitch hawker areas, including increased enforcement action and the implementation in November 2012 of a mechanism for suspending or cancelling the hawker licences of repeat offenders.

In September, the Government announced a five-year scheme to provide one-off grants to some 4,300 hawkers in 43 fixed-pitch hawker areas to reconstruct their stalls to specified fire safety standards or to relocate to other pitch spaces to reduce fire risks. An ex-gratia allowance will be paid to hawkers who voluntarily surrender their hawker licences. The scheme will be implemented in mid-2013.

Slaughterhouses

The FEHD oversees the hygiene standards of licensed slaughterhouses in Sheung Shui, Tsuen Wan and Cheung Chau. Meat supplied by the slaughterhouses has to pass inspection by health officials before delivery to markets. During 2012, 40,473 animal health certificates and 9,031 entry permits for local pigs were verified at the slaughterhouses, 55,582 samples of urine and tissue were taken from animals and tested for veterinary drug residues, and 1,638,115 pigs, 25,953 cattle and 9,045 goats were slaughtered.

The FEHD's Intelligence Unit continued to track down vendors selling chilled meat as fresh meat in 2012, and in collaboration with the Customs and Excise Department and the police carried out 45 raids, launched 29 prosecutions and seized 4.8 tonnes of smuggled meat.

Public Education

In 2012, the FEHD's Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre in Kowloon Park, Tsim Sha Tsui, organised 2,367 health talks for the general public and target groups, including school children, the elderly and ethnic minorities. A motor vehicle is also used as a mobile education centre to help disseminate food safety and environmental hygiene messages.

The CFS's Communication Resource Unit in the Fa Yuen Street Municipal Services Building, Mong Kok, organises food safety programmes and provides technical support to people in the food trade and the public. As of December 2012, 21 food trade associations and some 2,000 food premises and retail outlets had signed up to the CFS's Food Safety Charter, drawn up to promote best practices in handling food.

The CFS conducted 164 health talks on food safety during the year. It also employed two vans to broadcast food safety messages to people in housing estates and markets and launched a series of food safety promotion activities to encourage people to store food at the right temperature. The CFS continued to promote nutrition labelling and the wider use of nutrition labels to help people make suitable food choices.

Primary Production

Hong Kong's agriculture and fisheries industries are relatively small and receive no Government subsidies, but the Government assists them in improving the quality of their output, their

productivity and competitiveness. In 2012, the combined output of the two industries, which directly employed some 16,640 people, was \$3.25 billion. Vegetables accounted for 2 per cent of local consumption; cut flowers, 29 per cent; live pigs, 7 per cent; live poultry, 60 per cent; freshwater fish, 3 per cent; and local seafood, 30 per cent.

Agricultural Industry

Hong Kong's agricultural industry focuses mainly on producing good quality fresh food crops through intensive land use. About 2 per cent of New Territories land (where most farming is done) is used for growing crops, comprising mainly vegetables and cut flowers, with a combined output in 2012 valued at about \$237 million. Pigs and poultry are the principal food animals reared. In 2012, locally reared pigs earned about \$265 million, while poultry, including chickens and eggs, earned about \$236 million.

The AFCD encourages crop farmers to tap niche markets and to sharpen their competitiveness by cultivating safe and good quality vegetables. The department works with local organic farming groups and the Vegetable Marketing Organisation (VMO) to promote organic farming and to develop a market for organic vegetables. The department provides an organic farming support service to 204 farms located on about 80 hectares of land. The AFCD also promotes the use of greenhouse technology for intensive high-value crop production. During 2012, four improved varieties of vegetable and fruit (long-horn green pepper, round purple eggplant, yellow flesh watermelon, and potato) were introduced to farmers for cultivation in Hong Kong.

The AFCD and the VMO have managed the voluntary Accredited Farm Scheme since 1994 with the aim of providing a stable supply of high quality and safe vegetables. As at the end of 2012, 299 farms in Hong Kong, Guangdong and Ningxia Autonomous Region, spreading over 2,760 hectares of land, have been accredited under the scheme.

Leisure farms have become popular places for recreation in recent years. In collaboration with the local agricultural sector, the AFCD published a Guide to Hong Kong Leisure Farms 2012 and created a website (http://fedvmcs.org/farm_index.php) to help showcase a variety of leisure farms in Hong Kong to visitors.

Fisheries Industry

Fresh fish is one of Hong Kong's most important primary products. In 2012, fish caught and fish reared in ponds and floating cages at sea amounted to about 159,000 tonnes with a value of \$2.5 billion.

Hong Kong's fishing fleet consists of some 3,990 vessels, manned by about 8,800 local fishermen and some 4,600 Mainland deckhands. The predominant fishing method is trawling, which accounted for 88 per cent of fish caught, weighing about 136,000 tonnes. Other methods include lining, gill netting and purse-seining. The total catch in 2012 weighed 155,230 tonnes and had an estimated wholesale value of \$2.32 billion. The industry provided some 57,000 tonnes of fish for local consumption during the year.

Licensed by the AFCD, 1,008 mariculturists operate in 26 designated fish culture zones, supplying the market in 2012 with about 1,299 tonnes of live marine fish valued at \$117 million.

Freshwater and brackish water fish are reared in fish ponds located mainly across the northwestern part of the New Territories, and commercial production has declined with the increasing urbanisation of the New Territories. In 2012, pond fish culture yielded some 2,306 tonnes of fish, or 3 per cent of local freshwater fish consumption.

The AFCD combats destructive fishing practices, in the interest of ensuring sustainable development of the fishing industry and conserving fisheries resources in Hong Kong waters. Five cases of illegal fishing were successfully prosecuted in 2012.

The AFCD assists the industry in various ways to cope with the challenges it faces, including providing credit facilities for fishermen and owners of fish collectors to switch to sustainable fisheries, or to reduce fuel consumption or the carbon footprint of their operations, and for fish farmers to improve their aquaculture business. To help fishermen cope with the annual fishing moratorium in the South China Sea, the AFCD provided technical support, liaison services and credit facilities to them. Free training courses were also offered to fishermen during the annual fishing moratorium and at Chinese New Year in 2012.

Legislation to ban trawling in Hong Kong waters came into effect on 31 December 2012 as an integral part of efforts to restore Hong Kong's damaged seabed and depleted fisheries resources. Trawler owners affected by the ban were paid ex-gratia allowances. A voluntary vessel buy-out scheme is available to owners of inshore trawlers. Local deckhands working on board inshore trawlers affected by the ban may apply for one-off grants. Owners of trawlers and fish collectors who are affected may also apply for a one-off, low interest loan for upgrading their vessels to operate outside Hong Kong waters, or switching to more sustainable fisheries operations and other fisheries-related operations.

The Government will also introduce a special training programme in January 2013 to assist affected trawler fishermen and local deckhands in acquiring skills for sustainable operations such as mariculture and recreational fishing. If suitable vessels are available from the voluntary buy-out scheme, the AFCD will consider using them as artificial reefs, to help rehabilitate fishery resources in Hong Kong waters.

In June 2012, amendments to the Fisheries Protection Ordinance introduced a series of measures to control fishing activities in Hong Kong waters and conserve fisheries resources, including (a) setting up a registration system for local fishing vessels; (b) limiting new entrants to control the number of fishing vessels and fishing; (c) restricting the fishing activities of non-fishing vessels in Hong Kong waters and prohibiting fishing by non-local fishing vessels; and (d) designating fisheries protection areas.

The AFCD conducts studies and provides technical services to fish farmers to help the sustainable development of the aquacultural industry. To enhance productivity, the department continues to implement a fish health management programme that helps fish farmers prevent, diagnose and contain fish disease. AFCD staff visit fish farms regularly under the AFCD's 'Good

Aquaculture Practices Programme' to collect water and fish samples for analysis. Seminars are held for farmers to learn new techniques and good management practices. A total of 107 farms have joined the AFCD's voluntary 'Accredited Fish Farm Scheme'. To get accredited, farms must adopt good practices that raise their hygiene standards and fish quality. Tests, including analysis of drug residues and heavy metals in fish, are conducted to ensure that the cultured fish are fit for consumption. Over 12,000 kilograms of accredited fish of various species were sold under the scheme in 2012. The accredited fish carry tags for easy recognition.

Specially designed artificial reefs known as biofilters are used to improve water quality and seabed conditions at the fish culture zones at Kau Sai, Sham Wan and Lo Tik Wan. Alternative designs of biofilters are being explored to suit the conditions of different fish culture zones.

To meet public demand for recreational fishing facilities and to help mariculturists diversify their business, in 2012 the AFCD approved applications by some 30 mariculturists in 11 fish culture zones to operate recreational fishing businesses on licensed fish culture rafts.

To protect the mariculture industry, the department monitors red tides and sends red tide warnings through support groups at the fish culture zones. Warnings are also posted on the AFCD's website and conveyed through press releases. In 2012, 18 red tides were recorded in Hong Kong waters.

Wholesale Markets

Fresh food produce is sold in wholesale markets managed by the AFCD, the VMO, the Fish Marketing Organisation (FMO) and the private sector. In 2012, Government wholesale markets handled 270,000 tonnes of vegetables, 13,000 tonnes of poultry, 49,000 tonnes of freshwater fish and fish products, 103,000 tonnes of fruit and 70,000 tonnes of eggs with a combined value of \$6.5 billion.

The Western Wholesale Food Market and the Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market are the two largest composite wholesale food markets managed by the department. The Western Wholesale Food Market accommodates markets for freshwater fish, vegetables, fruit and eggs, enabling customers to purchase a wide range of fresh foods under one roof. The AFCD also manages two temporary wholesale markets, one in the North District for fresh vegetables, and another in Cheung Sha Wan, for live poultry.

The VMO is a statutory body governed by the Agricultural Products (Marketing) Ordinance. It provides wholesale marketing services for the sale of vegetables. It charges a commission on the vegetables sold, and in return provides trading facilities, transport and pesticide residue testing services to farmers and traders. Surplus income is ploughed back into farming development and scholarships for farmers' children. In 2012, the VMO handled 152,854 tonnes of vegetables valued at \$945 million.

The FMO is governed by the Marine Fish (Marketing) Ordinance. It provides wholesale marketing services at its seven wholesale markets. Revenue comes from the commission charged on fish sales and from fees charged for the use of market facilities. Surplus earnings are channelled back to the fisheries industry by way of low-interest loans to fishermen, outlay that

improves market services and facilities, and training grants and scholarships for the fishermen and their children. During the year, some 42,809 tonnes of marine fish valued at \$2.27 billion were sold through the FMO. The FMO develops fish products at its processing centre to help promote the quality of local products.

Control of Animal Diseases

As Hong Kong's inspection and quarantine authority for animals, the AFCD regulates cross-boundary animal movements to prevent animal diseases from entering the city. The AFCD also assesses the risk of disease in imported animals and animal products on the basis of their species, intended use and the disease status of the place of origin. The AFCD explains Hong Kong's import requirements to overseas veterinary authorities when necessary.

In 2012, some 6,100 permits were issued for animal imports, which included dogs, cats, horses, reptiles, birds, zoo animals and food animals such as pigs and cattle.

Quarantine Detector Dog Programme

The Quarantine Detector Dog Programme was introduced to help combat illegal importation of animals. The dogs are trained to detect live mammals, birds, reptiles and animal products hidden in luggage or under layers of clothing. These dogs are deployed to various boundary control points including Lok Ma Chau, Shenzhen Bay and the Hong Kong International Airport. In 2012, more than 300,000 travellers, 2,100 vehicles and 27,000 parcels were screened.

Animal Management

The AFCD adopts various animal management measures to control animal diseases, regulate the trading of animals, and promote respect and care for animals.

Hong Kong has been rabies-free since the 1980s. In 2012, some 66,000 dogs were licensed and vaccinated against rabies. About 7,900 stray dogs and 3,300 stray cats were brought to the AFCD Animal Management Centres during the year, including some surrendered by their owners. The AFCD runs a re-homing programme for the healthy and well-tempered ones.

All pet shops selling animals must be licensed by the AFCD which inspects these shops regularly to ensure that they do not contravene any of the licence conditions. Pet shops are required to obtain dogs for sale only from approved sources. The AFCD runs a programme for promoting respect and care for animals. It uses a broad range of communication tools to drive home the message. Twenty-six thematic exhibitions, roving exhibitions and carnivals were held during the year to promote responsible pet ownership and rabies prevention.

Animal Welfare

The AFCD collaborates with 12 animal welfare organisations (AWOs) in providing animal re-homing services, covering dogs, cats, rabbits, birds and reptiles. In 2012, the AFCD further strengthened collaboration with, and support to, its partner organisations in the re-homing of animals, including inviting AWOs to join forces with the AFCD in holding 'Animal Adoption Day'

activities and providing free de-sexing services for animals re-homed through the partner organisations.

To improve the handling of animal cruelty reports or complaints, an inter-departmental special working group was set up involving the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and government departments, such as the Hong Kong Police Force, the FEHD and the AFCD, to examine the Government's work on handling animal cruelty cases, devise guidelines and to ensure that animal welfare is well protected. The AFCD has enhanced its co-operation with AWOs through expanding the membership of the Animal Welfare Advisory Group (AWAG) and co-opting more representatives of AWOs to the various working groups under AWAG.

The AFCD launched a public consultation exercise between October and November 2012 on proposals to better regulate pet trading. These include tightening regulation of persons who breed and sell dogs with a licensing scheme; increasing penalties under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Animal Trader) Regulations; and empowering the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation to revoke animal trader licences under certain circumstances. The Government plans to table the Amendment Regulation before the Legislative Council in 2013.

Websites

Food and Health Bureau: www.fhb.gov.hk

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department: www.fehd.gov.hk

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department: www.afcd.gov.hk