

## Chapter 9

---

# Food Safety, Environmental Hygiene, Agriculture and Fisheries

*With more than 90 per cent of its food imported, Hong Kong devotes considerable efforts to ensuring the safety of the wide variety of food available for consumption. The government is committed to maintaining a clean and hygienic living environment and to protecting the public from threats of zoonotic disease.*

### Organisational Framework

The Food and Health Bureau is responsible for drawing up policies on food safety, environmental hygiene, animal health and welfare, agriculture and fisheries, and for allocating resources to execute these policies. It works closely with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Government Laboratory.

The FEHD ensures 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 supporting the agricultural and fisheries industries and provides farmers and fishermen with infrastructural and technical support such as market facilities and training services. The department also administers loans to them and advises the government on animal health and welfare matters.

The Government Laboratory provides testing services to support the regular food surveillance programme of the FEHD's Centre for Food Safety (CFS) and helps the centre handle food incidents.

### Licensing of Food Premises and Other Trades

The FEHD is the licensing authority for food businesses. It issues various food business licences; permits for the sale of restricted foods, including Chinese herb tea, milk, frozen confections, sushi and sashimi; permits for karaoke establishments; and licences for places of public entertainment, such as theatres, cinemas and entertainment machine centres. The department also licenses private swimming pools, commercial bathhouses, funeral parlours, undertakers of burials and factories engaged in obnoxious trades. It provides executive and secretarial support

to the Liquor Licensing Board, an independent statutory body that issues liquor licences, including those for clubs.

During 2015, the department issued 9,104 full, provisional and temporary food business licences, 624 permits for restricted foods, 1,486 licences for places of public entertainment, 31 licences for other trades, 1,194 liquor and club liquor licences, and eight permits for karaoke establishments in premises with restaurant licences.

The department accepts submissions of applications for food business/trade licences and permits through the internet.

### **Food Safety and Labelling**

The Centre for Food Safety is responsible for ensuring food sold in Hong Kong is safe and fit for consumption. About 64,400 samples of food were taken at import, wholesale and retail levels for chemical, microbiological and radiological testing in 2015. The overall satisfaction rate of these tests was 99.7 per cent.

During 2015, about 34,000 vehicles carrying vegetables, and 41,215 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. The station examined 2,132,295 live food animals and tested 7,953 blood and 53,197 urine, faecal and tissue samples for zoonotic disease and veterinary drug residues.

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 helps consumers make informed food choices, regulates misleading or deceptive labels and nutrition claims, and encourages food manufacturers to apply sound nutrition principles in formulating foods. In 2015, the centre conducted visual checks on 5,369 pre-packaged food products to ensure compliance with statutory '1+7' nutrition-labelling requirements and took 503 food samples for chemical analysis to verify the nutrition information and nutrition claims. The overall compliance rate was 99.55 per cent.

The Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulation 2014 mandates nutrition labelling of infant formula, follow-up formula and pre-packaged food for infants and young children under the age of 36 months, and regulates the nutritional composition of infant formula. The requirements on infant formula came into operation on 13 December 2015, while those on follow-up formula and pre-packaged food for infants and young children will take effect in June 2016. The centre conducted checks on infant formula products to ensure compliance with the statutory nutrition-labelling requirements and took samples for chemical analysis to verify the nutrition information and composition.

Since the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation came into effect on 1 August 2014, the centre has taken more than 36,000 food samples at import, wholesale and retail levels for testing on pesticide residues. The overall satisfactory rate is more than 99.7 per cent.

To better protect Hong Kong from the threat of avian influenza, the amended Imported Game, Meat, Poultry and Eggs Regulations came into operation on 5 December 2015 to regulate the import of poultry eggs.

The government conducted public consultation exercises in 2015 on the regulation of nutrition and health claims for formula products and pre-packaged food for infants and children under the age of 36 months; and on the regulation of edible fats and oils and recycling of waste cooking oil. It is in the course of formulating specific regulatory proposals, taking into full account the views of stakeholders.

### **Public Markets and Cooked Food Markets**

The FEHD operates 101 public markets, including 25 free-standing cooked food markets. There are some 14,400 stalls selling fresh products, cooked food, light refreshments and household items and providing service trades. As at the end of 2015, the overall occupancy rate at these markets was 91.1 per cent.

In May 2015, the bureau released a consultancy report on a study, commissioned in 2013, that examined how to improve the operating environment of public markets, including their functions and positioning, factors affecting their competitiveness, public expectations and ways to retain traditional trades. The government is following up the recommendations made in the report.

### **Hawkers**

The FEHD regulates hawking in Hong Kong. As at the end of 2015, there were 5,703 hawkers carrying out business in licensed fixed-pitch stalls and 430 itinerant hawkers.

A five-year 'Assistance Scheme for Hawkers in Fixed-pitch Hawker Areas', launched in June 2013, offers financial help to 4,300 hawkers in 43 fixed-pitch hawker areas to reduce fire risks in hawker areas. In 2015, the department obtained agreement on the relocation arrangements of all 496 fixed-pitch hawkers whose stalls were situated at building staircase discharge points or places that might obstruct the operation of fire engines.

Up to the end of 2015, the department had received 2,205 applications for relocation and reconstruction grants and 481 hawkers had surrendered their licences.

### **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 2015, 40,809 animal health certificates and 6,849 entry permits for local pigs were verified at the slaughterhouses, 50,867 samples of urine and tissue were taken from animals and tested for veterinary drug residues, and 1,669,103 pigs, 17,915 head of cattle and 4,085 goats were slaughtered.

In 2015, the FEHD's Intelligence Unit continued to track down vendors selling chilled meat as fresh meat and, in collaboration with the Customs and Excise Department and the Centre for Food Safety, carried out 26 raids, launched 26 prosecutions and seized 1.95 tonnes of smuggled meat.

### **Public Cleaning Services**

The FEHD provides services for street cleaning, household waste collection and public toilets. All streets are swept one to eight times a day, depending on their conditions. For main thoroughfares, flyovers and high-speed roads, mechanised cleaning is provided. Depending on the conditions of different districts, public streets are washed daily or as and when there is a need. Additional cleaning services are provided where necessary to maintain environmental cleanliness and hygiene.

Household waste is collected all year round. In 2015, about 75 per cent of waste collection services was outsourced and about 5,540 tonnes of household waste were collected daily by the department and its contractors.

In 2015, one new public toilet was constructed and 17 public toilets and one aqua privy were refurbished. Toilet attendant services are provided at heavily used public toilets.

The department takes enforcement action against littering, spitting and other unhygienic practices in public places. In 2015, it issued some 36,180 fixed penalty notices.

The government launched a two-month 'Keep Clean 2015 @ Hong Kong: Our Home' campaign in August. With the concerted efforts of the relevant bureaus and departments, the 18 District Councils, and different sectors in the community, various activities which helped fortify cross-sectoral collaboration and community-wide participation were rolled out during the campaign. Bureaus and departments also stepped up cleaning efforts in areas under their purview. Having reviewed the merits of the exercise, the Secretary for Food and Health decided to establish a platform to exchange views regularly with the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Committees of the District Councils. Through the platform, the bureau hopes to better engage the District Councils in keeping track of the latest environmental hygiene issues and identifying key areas that require priority attention, thereby allowing the government to review and adjust strategies in a manner that is more timely and reflective of district priorities.

### **Abatement of Sanitary Nuisances**

In 2015, the FEHD issued 6,107 Nuisance Notices requiring those responsible to stop sanitary nuisances such as refuse accumulation, dripping air conditioners and water seepage in private premises, and instituted 72 prosecutions against those who failed to comply with the notices.

### **Pest Control**

Preventing the spread of pest-borne diseases is one of the 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 the *Aedes albopictus*, a major carrier of dengue fever. Anti-mosquito teams conducted about 845,514 inspections of likely mosquito breeding spots and eliminated about 55,353 mosquito breeding places during the year.

Following three and two local cases of dengue fever in 2014 and 2015 respectively, the department continued to deploy additional anti-mosquito teams to sustain mosquito control efforts and also stepped up publicity to remind the public of the importance of mosquito control in 2015.

### **Cemeteries, Crematoria and Columbaria**

The department manages six government crematoria, 10 public cemeteries and eight public columbaria, and monitors the management of 27 private cemeteries.

To cater for growing public demand for columbaria, the government has adopted a three-pronged approach: increasing the supply of public niches, promoting 'green burial' and regulating private columbaria.

Twenty-four potential sites in the 18 districts have been identified for columbaria development. In 2015, the Tuen Mun District Council, the North District Council and the Wan Chai District Council were consulted on sites at Tsang Tsui, Wo Hop Shek Cemetery and Wong Nai Chung Road respectively. These three sites can provide a total of 204,855 new niches.

The government promotes environmentally friendly and sustainable ways for handling ashes, including scattering them in the 11 Gardens of Remembrance managed by the FEHD or at sea. The department provides a free ferry service for scattering ashes at sea and an Internet Memorial Service for the public to pay tribute to the deceased on the internet.

The Private Columbaria Bill, introduced to the Legislative Council on 25 June 2014, sets out a licensing scheme for private columbaria to ensure their compliance with statutory and government requirements, enhance consumer protection and promote the industry's sustainable development. LegCo is scrutinising the bill.

### **Public Education**

To reduce the public's intake of salt and sugar and lower the levels of salt and sugar in food, the government set up an International Advisory Panel on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food in 2014 and a Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food in 2015 to advise the Secretary for Food and Health on the international experience and local considerations regarding salt and sugar reduction measures. The Centre for Food Safety also launched a series of food safety promotion activities under the theme 'Hong Kong's Action on Salt and Sugar Reduction', promoting healthy eating with less salt and sugar to consumers and the food trade.

In 2015, the FEHD's Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre in Kowloon Park organised 2,373 health talks for the public and target groups, including students and the elderly.

A mobile education centre also helps disseminate food safety and environmental hygiene messages across the territory.

The CFS' Communication Resource Unit in Mong Kok organises food safety programmes and provides technical support to people in the food trade and the public. Up to the end of 2015, 23 food trade associations and 1,821 food premises and retail outlets had subscribed to the centre's Food Safety Charter, which was drawn up to promote best practices in handling food. During the year, the centre also conducted 185 health talks on food safety and deployed two vans to broadcast food safety messages in housing estates and markets.

### **Measures against Avian Influenza**

Government measures to keep avian influenza (AI) at bay include stringent monitoring of the poultry supply chain from farm to retail levels, vaccination of chickens against H5 AI and close surveillance of imported and local birds.

Under an agreement with the Mainland, all poultry, except pigeons, imported from registered farms must be vaccinated against H5 AI, commonly known as bird flu. Every live poultry consignment bound for Hong Kong must be tested negative for H5 and H7 AI before being released for sale. Government veterinarians also inspect registered farms on the Mainland to ensure their compliance with the bio-security requirements.

Hong Kong prohibits the keeping of chickens, ducks, geese, pigeons, quails and other poultry in backyards. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$100,000. Owners of racing pigeons are required to hold exhibition licences. Pet bird traders are required to submit official animal health certificates to the health authorities, 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 keep up-to-date records of their transactions and the number of birds in their possession.

All live poultry in public market stalls and fresh provision shops must be slaughtered by 8pm every day. Live poultry are not allowed in these premises between 8pm and 5am. Live poultry retailers must ensure 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.

To monitor AI effectively, samples are collected regularly for testing from poultry farms, wholesale and retail markets; from healthy, sick or dead birds; from birds kept in recreation parks and pet shops; and from wild birds in wetlands and elsewhere. The government provides a round-the-clock service for collecting sick and dead wild birds. In 2015, the AFCD collected 10,464 wild bird carcasses and three of them were found carrying the H5 AI virus.

Other preventive measures against AI include taking faecal and drinking water samples at live poultry retail outlets to test for the AI virus; conducting regular inspections of live poultry retail outlets to ensure compliance with the special licensing or tenancy conditions on AI control; cleaning common parts of FEHD markets thoroughly three times daily; cleaning live poultry

market stalls after business hours daily, followed by further thorough cleaning and disinfection by FEHD contractors; maintaining the cleanliness of market stalls' ventilation systems; and conducting regular inspections, washing and disinfection of public places where wild birds gather and taking stringent enforcement action against the feeding of wild birds in public places.

The CFS collects swab samples from 30 poultry in each consignment of live poultry imported from the Mainland to conduct polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for influenza A, covering both H5 and H7 AI. In 2015, it took 10,213 samples from imported live poultry for the test. Since 24 January 2014, H7 serological testing has been in place to strengthen surveillance against AI.

On 30 December 2014, a number of samples in a consignment of imported live poultry were confirmed positive for H7 AI by PCR test. Following the incident, the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market was closed and trading of live poultry was suspended. To facilitate the continued supply of live chickens during the closure of the Cheung Sha Wan facility, the Ta Kwu Ling Check Point handled local live chickens from 10 to 21 January 2015. The Cheung Sha Wan facility resumed operation on 21 January 2015.

### **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 territory. The department 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, and formulates the corresponding quarantine measures for the import control of animals and animal products.

In 2015, 8,000 permits were issued for animal imports, which included dogs, cats, horses, birds, zoo animals and live 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 animals and animal products hidden in luggage at boundary control points including Lok Ma Chau, Shenzhen Bay and Hong Kong International Airport. In 2015, more than 195,000 travellers, 1,300 vehicles and 31,000 parcels and pieces of luggage 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 2015, some 65,500 dogs were licensed and vaccinated against rabies. About 2,400 stray dogs and 1,400 stray cats were brought to the AFCD Animal Management Centres during the year, including those surrendered by their owners. The department runs a rehoming programme for the healthy and well-tempered ones.

All pet shops selling animals must be licensed by the department, which inspects these shops regularly to ensure they do not contravene any of the licence conditions. Pet shops are required to obtain dogs for sale only from approved sources. The department runs a programme to promote respect and care for animals. It uses a broad range of communication tools to drive home the message. In 2015, 85 educational talks, two dog training courses and 50 thematic/roving exhibitions and pet adoption events were held to promote responsible pet ownership and rabies prevention.

## **Animal Welfare**

The AFCD collaborates with 15 animal welfare organisations (AWOs) in providing animal rehoming services, covering dogs, cats, rabbits, birds and reptiles. The department provides support to its partner organisations in rehoming animals, including inviting AWOs to join forces with it in holding Animal Adoption Day activities and providing free desexing services for animals rehomed through the partner organisations. The department also continues to provide financial assistance in the form of a subvention for AWO projects which aim to enhance animal welfare and promote better animal management.

To improve the handling of animal cruelty reports or complaints, an inter-departmental special working group involving the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and relevant government departments, including the Hong Kong Police Force, the FEHD and the AFCD, examines the government's work on handling animal cruelty cases, devises guidelines and ensures animal welfare is well protected.

The government is working on proposed amendments to the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Animal Trader) Regulations to strengthen regulation of pet trading to better protect animal welfare. The legislative proposals include introducing a new licensing scheme to tighten the regulation of persons who breed and sell dogs; increasing penalties under the law; and empowering the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation to revoke animal trader licences under certain circumstances.

## **Primary Production**

Hong Kong's agricultural and fisheries industries are relatively small in scale. The government helps improve their output quality, productivity and competitiveness. In 2015, the combined output of the two industries, which directly employed some 18,000 people, was \$4.37 billion. Local vegetables accounted for 1.9 per cent of local consumption; cut flowers, 28 per cent; live pigs, 6.1 per cent; live poultry, 95.1 per cent; freshwater fish, 2 per cent; and seafood, 28 per cent.

## **Agricultural Industry**

The agricultural industry focuses mainly on producing good-quality fresh food crops through intensive land use. Less than 1 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 2015 valued at about \$292 million. Pigs and poultry are the principal food animals reared. Locally reared pigs and poultry, including chickens and eggs, yielded earnings of about \$259 million and about \$394 million respectively.



The AFCD encourages crop farmers to tap niche markets and sharpen their competitiveness by cultivating safe and good-quality vegetables. To promote organic farming, the department provides an organic farming support service to 270 farms located on about 99.6 hectares of land. It also promotes the use of greenhouse technology for intensive high-value crop production. During 2015, three improved varieties of vegetable and fruit, namely, the yellow flesh watermelon, lettuce and cauliflower of various colours, were introduced to farmers for cultivation.

The AFCD and the Vegetable Marketing Organisation (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 2015, 308 farms in Hong Kong, Guangdong Province and Ningxia Autonomous Region, spreading over 2,989 hectares of land, have been accredited under the scheme.

Leisure farms have become popular places for recreation in recent years. The department, in collaboration with the local agricultural sector, provides information on the territory's leisure farms through its annual publication, *A Guide to Hong Kong Leisure Farms*, and its mobile application, Hong Kong Leisure Farms.

Between December 2014 and March 2015, the government conducted a public consultation exercise inviting views on adopting a more proactive approach towards the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture. The public views received indicated wide support for the new agriculture policy and the package of supportive measures that the government had proposed. The government has since proceeded to map out the way forward, taking into account the views received.

### **Fisheries Industry**

Fresh fish is one of Hong Kong's most important primary products. In 2015, fish caught and fish reared in ponds and floating cages at sea amounted to about 148,600 tonnes with a value of \$2.5 billion.

Hong Kong's fishing fleet consists of some 5,050 vessels, manned by about 10,500 local fishermen and some 4,400 Mainland deckhands. These include larger vessels operating mainly in the South China Sea, and smaller vessels in local waters. The total catch in 2015 weighed 145,193 tonnes and had an estimated wholesale value of \$2.34 billion. The industry provided some 62,000 tonnes of fish for local consumption during 2015.

Licensed by the AFCD, 969 mariculturists operate in 26 designated fish culture zones, supplying consumers with 1,219 tonnes of live marine fish in 2015 valued at \$105 million.

Freshwater and brackish water fish are reared in fish ponds located mainly in the northwestern New Territories. In 2015, pond fish culture yielded some 2,100 tonnes of fish, or 2 per cent of local freshwater fish consumption.

Under the Fisheries Protection Ordinance (Cap. 171), all local fishing vessels operating in Hong Kong waters are required to register with the department. The aim is to control the number of fishing vessels and maintain an appropriate level of fishing effort in local waters.

The department combats destructive fishing practices, including trawling, to ensure sustainable development of the fishing industry and to conserve fisheries resources in Hong Kong waters. Thirty-five cases of illegal fishing were successfully prosecuted in 2015.

The department helps the industry in various ways to cope with the challenges it faces, including providing credit facilities to fishermen, owners of fish-collecting vessels and fish farmers for sustainable development and general productive purposes. It also offers free training courses to fishermen during the annual fishing moratorium and at Chinese New Year. A \$500 million Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund, set up in 2014, helps fishermen adopt sustainable and high-value-added methods of operation, and subsidises programmes and research to enhance the overall competitiveness of the industry. As at the end of 2015, the department received 23 applications and approved six of those applications, comprising four aquaculture and two fisheries-related eco-tourism projects. The total commitment involved was about \$28 million.

The department conducts studies and provides technical support to fish farmers to help the sustainable development of the aquaculture industry. Under its Good Aquaculture Practices Programme and Fish Health Inspection Programme, the department continues to assist fish farmers in preventing, diagnosing and containing fish disease. The department visits fish farms regularly under these programmes to collect water and fish samples for analysis. Seminars are held for farmers to learn new techniques and good management practices. In addition, 118 farms have joined the department's voluntary Accredited Fish Farm Scheme. More than 15,000kg of accredited fish of various species were sold under the scheme in 2015. 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 fish culture zones at Yim Tin Tsai (East), 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, 45 mariculturists in 10 fish culture zones have the AFCD's approval to operate recreational fishing businesses on licensed fish culture rafts.

To protect the mariculture industry, the department monitors red tides and issues red tide alerts through support groups at the fish culture zones. Alerts are posted on its website and conveyed through press releases. In 2015, nine 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 2015, government wholesale markets, namely, the Western Wholesale Food Market, Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market, Cheung

Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market and North District Temporary Wholesale Market for Agricultural Products, handled 246,710 tonnes of vegetables, 8,225 tonnes of poultry, 55,474 tonnes of freshwater fish and fish products, 103,864 tonnes of fruit and 71,703 tonnes of eggs with a combined value of \$6.6 billion.

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 2015, the VMO handled 1,224,760 tonnes of vegetables valued at \$939 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. In 2015, some 46,430 tonnes of marine fish valued at \$3.21 billion were sold through the FMO. The organisation also develops fish products at its processing centre to promote the quality of local products.

### **Websites**

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department: [www.afcd.gov.hk](http://www.afcd.gov.hk)

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department: [www.fehd.gov.hk](http://www.fehd.gov.hk)

Food and Health Bureau: [www.fhb.gov.hk](http://www.fhb.gov.hk)

Internet Memorial Service: [www.memorial.gov.hk](http://www.memorial.gov.hk)