

LCQ2: Development of livestock industry

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

In recent years, a number of livestock farms affected by the Government's development plans needed to be resited. While the Government amended the legislation last year to facilitate the relocation of chicken farms, the farmers concerned have indicated that they are faced with a number of difficulties in identifying lands. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of pig farms and chicken farms affected by the Government's development plans which were successfully resited in each of the past five years; whether it has projected the number of the relevant cases for each of the coming 10 years; whether it will assist in the resiting of livestock farms through new measures, e.g. providing ancillary facilities and lands;

(2) whether it will further remove the red tape in respect of the resiting policy for livestock farms, including releasing more lands for farms to move in and, on the premise of making good use of technology and enhancing bio-security measures, relaxing the requirement that a prescribed buffer distance be maintained between livestock farms and lands "with sensitive uses"; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that while agro-technology has been making progress in leaps and bounds in recent years, the policy on and testing standards for livestock farming, which have been in place for years, have failed to keep up with the times, whether the Government will study, with a new mindset, the following measures for promoting the sustained development of the livestock industry: supporting farmers in developing livestock farms in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area or in other Mainland cities, setting aside lands on outlying islands or those derived through reclamation for use by the livestock industry, establishing a "green lane" for mutual recognition of test results between the Mainland and Hong Kong, as well as designating the Agricultural Park (Phase 2) for the development of the livestock industry?

Reply:

President,

Thank you the Hon Steven Ho for the questions. Having consulted the

Development Bureau, my reply to the question is as follows:

(1) No livestock farm has been affected by government development plans and cleared over the past five years. In the next few years, the livestock farms that would be affected by New Development Area (NDA) projects will include one pig farm in Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA, and three pig farms and two chicken farms in the Yuen Long South Development.

As for the new development area in the New Territories North which is currently under study, the impact on livestock farms would be subject to the study results.

Under the current policy, eligible business undertakings (including affected chicken farms and pig farms) affected by the government's clearance can receive ex-gratia allowances as financial assistance. After receiving the ex-gratia allowance, if the operator intends to find other suitable private land to continue operating, the Development Bureau can provide advice and assistance on the planning or land administration procedures involved.

Regarding relocation proposals from livestock farms, the Government is open to proposals, provided they will not increase the livestock rearing capacity and biosecurity measures in farms can be enhanced to reduce the risk of diseases infecting livestock. The Government will consider such proposals and provide advice and assistance as appropriate. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will also provide support based on the relocation needs of individual farmers. Livestock farmers who require loan assistance may apply to the AFCD for low-interest loans under the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund and the J. E. Joseph Trust Fund, granted for development and working capital.

(2) The Government has amended the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Licensing of Livestock Keeping) Regulation to relax the existing statutory requirements for premises used for keeping chickens, so as to facilitate the relocation of existing chicken farms to other suitable sites in the Livestock Waste Control Areas that have not received ex-gratia payments for cessation of livestock keeping. The amendment came into force on July 1, 2020.

Livestock farms need to comply with the provisions of the Waste Disposal Ordinance (Cap. 354). Moreover, during site selection, in consideration of air pollution nuisance, livestock farms should be located away from the main urban centres wherever practicable and maintain a buffer distance of at least 200 metres from sensitive uses nearby (such as residential).

Regarding distances between livestock farms, various countries and places have also set distance requirements for the prevention and control of the spread of livestock diseases. The AFCD has taken into consideration local farms' compliance with biosecurity plans and administration of livestock disease preventive measures, for example mandatory vaccination against avian influenza and implementation of preventive measures against African Swine Fever. The required distance between farms, currently not less than 500 metres, is already less stringent than that in most other places. The AFCD

understands that as livestock rearing techniques and farm facilities improve, new livestock farm measures may better enhance biosecurity. Persons in charge of farms may submit to the AFCD relevant information on farm facilities and operational proposals for assessment. Depending on individual farm's circumstances, such as the suitability and appropriateness of the biosecurity measures, the AFCD will consider whether licensing requirements are met.

(3) The Government has been supporting the sustainable development of the local agricultural industry and implementing a number of supportive measures. The Government set up a Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) in 2016 to facilitate sustainable agricultural development and enhance the overall competitiveness of the industry. For example, SADF has allocated funding to the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences, City University of Hong Kong, to provide veterinary services (including disease diagnosis and treatment) to local livestock farms, as well as to purchase necessary vaccines and medicines for livestock farms. In addition, the Government has set up a Farm Improvement Scheme under the SADF to provide direct grants to livestock farmers, for acquisition of small farming equipment and tools, thereby enhancing their productivity and operating efficiency as well as farm biosecurity.

As for the development of livestock-keeping in the Greater Bay Area and other cities in the Mainland, the Government will continue to explore new modes of agricultural exchange and collaboration, coordinate participation in agricultural exhibitions, co-organise agricultural exchange activities, so as to help bridge and connect with agricultural enterprises and agriculture authorities for collaboration.

The Agricultural Park is established by the Government to help nurture agro-technology and agro-business management for crop productions, and hence not suitable for relocation of livestock farms. Other animal-rearing industries may also impact the irrigation sources.

Thank you, President.