

LCQ9: Control measures on food imported from Japan

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 16):

Question:

Following the incident of leakage of radioactive matters from the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan which happened on March 11, 2011 (the Fukushima incident), the Government issued an order under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132) to prohibit the import of all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and milk powder (Category A food items) from five prefectures of Japan (namely, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma), as well as to require that the import of all chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, all poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products (Category B food items) from these five prefectures must be accompanied by a certificate issued by the competent authority of Japan certifying that the radiation levels of such food items do not exceed the guideline levels. The order took effect on March 24, 2011 and is still in force. The Government has indicated that it has all along been maintaining communication with the authorities of Japan and reviewing such import control measures in the light of the latest situation. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of samples of imported Japanese food tested on their radiation levels by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) since the occurrence of the Fukushima incident, and the respective numbers and percentages of samples the test results of which were satisfactory and unsatisfactory;
- (2) whether CFS has fully grasped the outcome of the tests conducted by the authorities of Japan and other economies on the radiation levels of Categories A and B food items exported from the five aforesaid prefectures; if so, of the respective latest test results, including whether the radiation levels of these two categories of food items have met the standards for safe consumption; and
- (3) of the factors that CFS takes into consideration in its review of the aforesaid import control measures, and the circumstances under which such measures will be relaxed or revoked?

Reply:

President,

Following the Fukushima nuclear power plant incident in Japan on March 11, 2011, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) immediately stepped up the surveillance of the

radiation levels of food imported from Japan to safeguard food safety. On March 23, 2011, CFS detected that the radiation levels of three samples from the vegetables imported from Chiba prefecture on that day had exceeded the guideline levels adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex guideline levels). On March 24, 2011, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued an order under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132) (the Order) to safeguard food safety and public health.

The Order prohibits the import of all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and milk powder from the five affected prefectures, namely Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma. The import of all chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products from the above prefectures is prohibited, unless the food products are accompanied by a certificate issued by the competent authority of Japan certifying that their radiation levels do not exceed the Codex guideline levels. The Order is still in force.

The CFS has been conducting tests on the radiation levels for every consignment of food products imported from Japan (not limited to those imported from the five prefectures) ever since the Order has come into effect, to ensure food safety. The CFS updates the latest figures and the test results on food imported from Japan on its website every working day for public inspection.

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) From March 24, 2011 to May 8, 2018, the CFS tested more than 490 000 samples of food imported from Japan. The test results showed that none of the samples had radiation levels exceeded the Codex guideline levels.

(2) Since April 1, 2012, the Japanese authorities have set more stringent levels for radiocaesium (Caesium-134 and Caesium-137) than the Codex guideline levels. Details are as follows:

Food category	Japanese levels	Codex guideline levels
General food products	100 Bq/kg	1 000 Bq/kg
Milk	50 Bq/kg	
Food products for infants and young children		

Information from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan indicated that, as at early March 2018, over two million food samples were collected in Japan for radiation testing. The radiation levels of a great majority of these samples were below the Japanese levels, which are more stringent than the Codex guideline levels. When samples are found to have radiation levels exceeding the Japanese levels and the Codex guideline

levels, the Japanese authorities will prohibit the domestic sale and export of the food concerned.

According to the information available, over the past three years, the European Union, the United States, Canada, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand had not announced any cases of Japanese food samples, including vegetables, fruits and milk from the aforementioned five prefectures, found to have exceeded the prescribed radiation levels.

(3) Ensuring food safety is the Government's prime consideration. The Food and Health Bureau and the CFS have been maintaining communication with the Japanese authorities and reviewing the control measures on food imported from Japan in the light of the latest situation. The factors taken into account include assessments made by international agencies, food surveillance results of the Japanese authorities, the latest control measures taken by other economies on food from Japan, local food surveillance results, consistency of the control measures with the World Trade Organization's requirements and public concern.