

LCQ9: Live poultry trade

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (April 22):

Question:

Under the existing policy, the Government will not issue new licences for fresh provision shops with permission for selling live poultry nor grant new tenancies for live poultry stalls in public markets, and the existing licences/tenancies may be succeeded only by the immediate family members of the licensees/tenants. As a result, the numbers of these two types of live poultry retailers will only be dwindling. Furthermore, the Government will not issue new chicken farm licences, and quite a number of chicken farms affected by development projects have no choice but to cease operation as no suitable relocation sites can be identified. The above situations have left the live poultry trade of Hong Kong hardly any room for sustainable development, and caused inconvenience to those members of the public who want to buy live chickens. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of (i) licences for fresh provision shops with permission for selling live poultry and (ii) live poultry stalls in public markets, in each of the past three years, with a tabulated breakdown by District Council district; the existing measures in place to assist these two types of retailers who are affected by redevelopment projects or market closures in relocating to other places for continued operation, and the number of successful relocation cases in the past three years under the assistance from such measures;

(2) whether the Government will (i) consider increasing the numbers of the two types of live poultry retailers, and (ii) examine the distribution of such retailers in various districts, so as to ensure that members of the public can purchase live poultry conveniently;

(3) given that the Government plans to relax the restrictions on the relocation of chicken farms under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Licensing of Livestock Keeping) Regulation (Cap. 139 sub. leg. L), so as to facilitate the relocation of chicken farms affected by government land development projects for continued operation, of the progress and timetable of the relevant legislative amendment exercise;

(4) as it is learnt that there are quite a number of development projects at present which have affected/will affect the existing chicken farms, of the existing measures in place to assist in the relocation of such farms, and the number of successful relocation cases in the past three years under the assistance from such measures; and

(5) of the measures in place to help maintain reasonable numbers of chicken farms and live poultry retailers, and whether it will formulate a policy for maintaining the sustainable development of the live poultry trade?

Reply:

President,

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

(1) and (2) The Government launched the Voluntary Surrender Scheme and the Buyout Scheme in 2004-05 and 2008 respectively for the live poultry trade to reduce the numbers of poultry farms and live poultry stalls in Hong Kong and to minimise human infection of Avian Influenza (AI) through live poultry. As a result, the number of local poultry farms dropped from 192 in 2004 to 29 at present, while that of live poultry retailers dropped from over 800 to 128. To keep the risk of AI under control, the Government has since contained the size of the live poultry trade at the current level.

The numbers of (i) licences for fresh provision shops with permission for selling live poultry and (ii) live poultry stalls in public markets in each of the past three years (as at year end), broken down by District Council district:

District / Year	Fresh provision shops with permission for selling live poultry			Live poultry stalls in public markets		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Central and Western	2	2	2	7	7	7
Wan Chai	3	3	2	7	7	7
Eastern	2	2	2	6	6	6
Southern	0	0	0	1	1	1
Islands	1	1	1	0	0	0
Yau Tsim Mong	9	9	9	6	6	6
Sham Shui Po	2	2	2	11	11	11
Kowloon City	1	1	1	5	5	5
Wong Tai Sin	3	3	3	4	4	4
Kwun Tong	4	4	4	4	4	4
Kwai Tsing	1	1	1	2	2	2
Tsuen Wan	0	0	0	9	9	9
Tuen Mun	1	1	1	4	4	4

Yuen Long	4	4	4	5	5	5
North	0	0	0	5	5	5
Tai Po	2	2	2	5	5	5
Sha Tin	7	7	7	4	4	4
Sai Kung	3	3	3	0	0	0
Total	45	45	44	85	85	85

The consultancy study subsequently commissioned by the Government on the way forward of the live poultry trade in Hong Kong was completed in mid-2017. Taking into account the study's recommendation and the views collected during the public consultation conducted afterwards, the Government agreed to the broad direction of the recommendation, i.e. to maintain the status quo of continuing the sale of live poultry at retail level. We have no plan to increase the number of live poultry retail outlets for the time being.

To control and prevent AI, relocation of existing fresh provision shops selling live poultry is generally not permissible. And according to the current public market tenancy conditions, tenants are generally only allowed to operate live chicken retail business at the stalls leased to them. However, if the fresh provision shops have to be relocated for continued operation due to reasons of force majeure (e.g. relocation of business premises necessitated by demolition) which are to the satisfaction of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), FEHD will consider the cases on individual merits. In addition, as for existing market stall tenants (including live poultry market stall tenants) who are affected by the redevelopment plans or closure of FEHD's public markets, FEHD will provide assistance as appropriate, such as arranging them to bid for other public market stalls to continue their business and providing relocation allowance etc. In the past three years, a total of six fresh provision shops were issued licences to continue selling live poultry after relocation, and four live poultry market stalls were relocated to other public markets for continued operation due to consolidation of the public markets in which they were originally located.

(3) and (4) Under the existing provisions of the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Licensing of Livestock Keeping) Regulation (Cap. 139L), it is difficult for existing chicken farms to find any other premises in the Livestock Waste Control Areas which can satisfy the relevant conditions for relocation. To further minimise AI risk, we have amended the Regulation to relax the existing statutory requirements for premises used for keeping chickens, so as to facilitate the enhancement of biosecurity at chicken farms and the relocation of chicken farms affected by Government development projects to other suitable sites for continued operation. The Amendment Regulation, which was gazetted on March 13 and tabled at the Legislative Council for scrutiny on March 18, is expected to come into force on July 1 this year.

In the past three years, no chicken farms were required to be relocated due to being affected by Government development projects (see Note 1). Chicken farmers who need assistance in relocating their farms could apply to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) for low-interest loans under the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund and the J. E. Joseph Trust Fund as development and working capital. AFCD will also provide appropriate support to cater for the needs of individual farmers.

(5) As mentioned above, taking into account the consultancy study's recommendation and the views collected during the public consultation conducted afterwards, the Government agreed to the broad direction of the study's recommendation, i.e. to maintain the status quo. We believe that the above arrangements for chicken farm relocation and live poultry retail outlets have already struck a proper balance between containing AI risk and maintaining a stable supply of live poultry in Hong Kong.

The Government has been supporting the sustainable development of the livestock industry without prejudice to public health and AI control. In this connection, the Government set up a Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) of \$500 million in 2016 to provide financial support for the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture. Livestock farmers may also make use of and benefit from the SADF for strengthening their farm biosecurity, enhancing value-added or mitigating the possible nuisance that the farms may cause to the environment. In 2019, AFCD approved about \$15 million from the SADF to local universities for applied technology projects on improving poultry health and production in Hong Kong. In addition, the Farm Improvement Scheme set up under the SADF provides direct grants to farmers for acquisition of small farming equipment and materials to help them modernise their farming equipment and facilities, thereby enhancing their productivity and operating efficiency as well as farm biosecurity.

Note 1: According to the existing information of the Development Bureau, there are two chicken farms fell within the later phase of the Yuen Long South Development (i.e. the second and the remaining phases). The relevant timetable for relocation will be confirmed during the detailed study of the said development project.