

Preservatives in Food (Amendment) Regulation 2024 gazetted

The Government gazetted today (October 10) the Preservatives in Food (Amendment) Regulation 2024 (Amendment Regulation) to update the food safety standards in relation to preservatives and antioxidants in food.

The objective of the Amendment Regulation is to keep local food safety standards on par with international standards, thereby enhancing consumer protection and facilitating the food trade. The Amendment Regulation has kept the standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) as the backbone, supplemented with those adopted by the Mainland and by Hong Kong's other major food-trading partners.

A Government spokesman said, "A four-month public consultation was conducted from May 29 to September 30 last year, to collect views on the proposed amendments to the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD). Respondents and stakeholders generally welcomed and supported the proposed amendments. Taking into account the comments received during the public consultation, we have formulated the updated proposals, as reflected in the Amendment Regulation."

The Amendment Regulation updates the definitions of "preservative" and "antioxidant" with reference to the corresponding definitions adopted by Codex. The list of permitted preservatives/antioxidants has also been updated, which comprises 58 preservatives/antioxidants after the legislative amendments. The number of "additive-food" pairs with specified maximum permitted levels has increased from around 900 to around 2 000.

"We consider that the Amendment Regulation should be implemented as soon as possible. However, we acknowledge the importance of providing sufficient time for the stakeholders to adjust to the new food safety standards, and for the local testing laboratories to establish the capability for performing relevant tests. We have also taken into consideration the longer shelf life of processed and pre-packaged foods that may contain preservatives or antioxidants. On balance, we propose a transitional period of 24 months, during which it would be legal for any single food item to comply wholly with the requirements of either the existing or the amended Cap. 132BD," the spokesman added.

The Amendment Regulation will be tabled at the Legislative Council on October 16 for negative vetting.