

Maintaining the Cold Chain When Importing Perishable Foods



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Background



- Recently, the food poisoning outbreak associated with eating of sandwiches from Taiwan has aroused public concern
- **Improper temperature and time control** during the transportation and storage of food can cause excessive growth of pathogens
- The CFS reminds the trade the importance of maintaining the cold chain when importing perishable foods

What Foods are Perishable?

- Two completely different families of bacteria can be found on food
 - **pathogenic bacteria**, the kind that cause food poisoning
 - **spoilage bacteria**, the kind of bacteria that cause foods to deteriorate and develop unpleasant odors, tastes, and textures
- Perishable foods are any foods that need to be kept refrigerated (4°C) or frozen (-18°C) to minimize or prevent growth of **pathogenic bacteria** and/or **food spoilage**
 - Examples: food that consists wholly or in part of milk, milk products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish or shellfish, etc.

Perishable “Ready-to-eat” Foods are High-risk

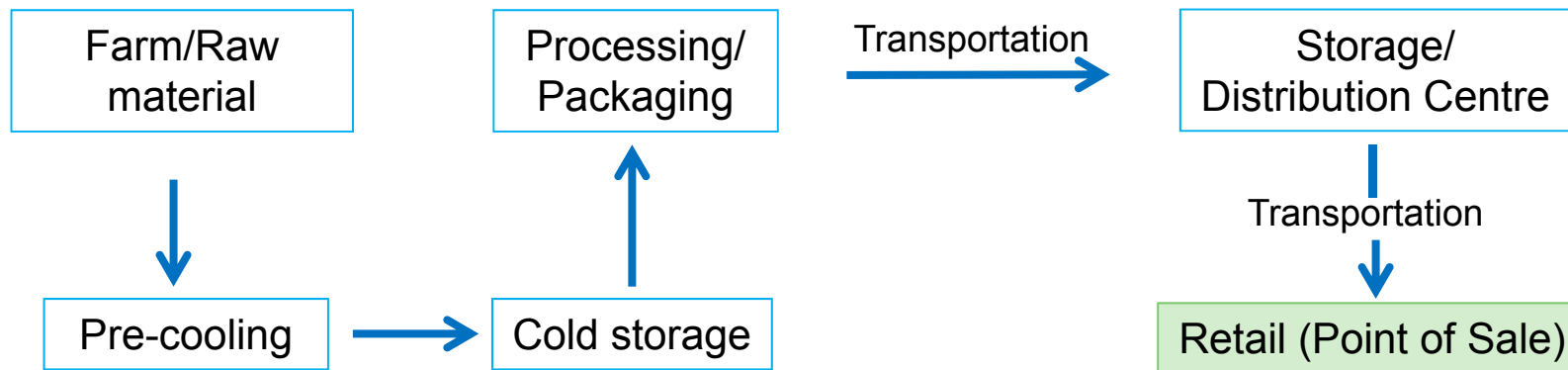
- Any ready-to-eat food (cooking or heat treatments are not required) that are perishable (supports the growth of pathogenic bacteria easily) are high-risk
- No further cooking = no step to eliminate microbial hazards → **High-risk**
- Examples: milk, gravy, any foods containing eggs, meat, poultry, seafood as ingredients (such as sandwiches, ham, sushi, custard, dairy-based desserts, etc.), and prepared fruits and vegetables (such as salads)

Temperature Danger Zone

- Under suitable temperature (i.e. **from 4°C to 60°C**), bacteria can multiply very quickly on high-risk foods
- Their number can double every 10 to 20 minutes
- When some pathogenic bacteria multiply to a certain amount, they can cause **food poisoning**
- Refrigeration **slows** bacterial growth and freezing **stops** it



Cold Chain in Food Trade



- A cold chain is a **temperature-controlled and monitored** supply chain
- The goal of the cold chain is to keep a sample or material within a certain temperature range during all stages of delivery, processing and storage

Food Safety Questions to Think About before Importing Food

- Is the food product I intent to import into Hong Kong a perishable/high-risk food?
- What are the specific temperatures and time-temperature tolerances on each process in the cold chain?
- Can my suppliers/distributors/logistics providers ensure that the cold chain is maintained before I receive the product? And how?
- After receiving, can I keep the product at safe temperature during transportation/storage before delivering them to consumers? And how?

Advice to Trade

- The **importers** should verify that their overseas suppliers have proper controls (e.g. implementing HACCP food safety management system) in place **to ensure that the imported perishable foods are fit for human consumption and comply with legal standards**
- The importers should ensure that perishable foods are transported and stored at appropriate temperature throughout the whole supply chain
- Observing the shelf-life (i.e. expiry date) of the food under specific temperature as suggested by suppliers

Thank you!