

**Centre for Food Safety**  
**Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**  
**Notes of the Fifty Eighth Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum**  
**held on 29 March 2017 at 2:30 p.m.**  
**in Conference Room at Room 102, 1/F, New Wan Chai Market,**  
**258 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

**Present**

**Government Representatives**

Dr. HO Yuk Yin	Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment & Communication)	(Chairman)
Dr. Samuel YEUNG	Principal Medical Officer (Risk Assessment & Communication)	
Mr. Peter TSANG	Superintendent (Import/Export) <sup>3</sup>	
Dr. Patrick LAU	Veterinary Officer (Food of Animal Origin)	
Mr. HO Kwok Wai	Scientific Officer (Nutrition Labelling)	
Mr. Arthur YAU	Scientific Officer (Contaminant)	
Ms. Alam NG	Research Officer (Risk Assessment)	
Ms. LEUNG Mee Sze	Senior Health Inspector (Import/Export) Compliance and Investigation <sup>2</sup>	
Mr. LAI Wing Chi	Superintendent (Risk Communication)	(Secretary)

**Trade Representatives**

Ms. Pinky LEE	759 Store
Ms. May LAU	A & W Food Service Ltd
Ms. Rene POON	A Top Consultancy Limited
Ms. Annie YEUNG	A.S. Watson Industries
Mr. LO Lok Sang	A-1 Bakery Co., (HK) LTD
Mr. Andrew WONG	Abbott Laboratories Limited
Ms. Lilian TANG	Aeon Topvalu (Hong Kong) Co., Limited
Ms. CHEUNG Wai Shan	Aji-Bi-Chinmi Co. (HK) Ltd
Mr. Ronald SIEW	ALS Technichem (HK) Pty Ltd
Ms. Caroline YUEN	American Consulate General Hong Kong
Ms. Rebecca MAK	Amoy Food Limited
Mr. SIU Yun Tang	B & S Company

Mr. LAM Pak Wah	Best Harvest Company Limited
Mr. Philip WANG	Blast Imports
Ms. Vincci KO	Café de Coral Holdings Limited
Ms. Whitney CHOW	Café Deco Group
Mr. Hez TSANG	Calbee Four Seas Co., Ltd
Ms. Peggy CHAN	Campbell Soup Asia Ltd
Mr. LO Tim Lum	Castco Testing Centre Ltd
Ms. Jessica OU YANG	Catalo Natural Health Foods Ltd
Ms. Cindy YOUNG	CCFS Co., Ltd
Ms. May LEUNG	Chemical Laboratory (HK) PTE. Limited
Mr. Chi WONG	China Inspection Co. Ltd
Mr. Donald LAM	China Resources Ng Fung International Distribution Company Limited
Ms. Grace YEE	City Super Ltd
Mr. Y.L LAU	CMA Testing and Certification Laboratories
Mr. CHUNG Chin Ming	Coca-Cola China Ltd.
Mr. Houston WONG	Consulate General Of Canada Trade Commissioner Service
Mr. Roy FUNG	Consulate General of Mexico in Hong Kong and Macao SAR
Mr. LEE Yu Hong	Dah Chong Hong
Mr. Philip KWAN	Danone ELN HK Ltd
Mr. Carlo Catingan	Dole HK Ltd
Mr. James WONG	EDO Trading Co
Ms. LEUNG King Man	Enviro Labs Ltd
Ms. CHAN Sok Meng	Fairwood Holdings Limited
Mr. Henry CHENG	Fonterra Brands (Hong Kong) Ltd
Mr. Freddy FONG	Foodscan Analytics Ltd
Ms. CHEUNG Sit Yee	Fresh-cut Produces Ltd
Ms. Doris CHAN	Friesland Campina (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Ms. Noel HO	Garden Heart Food Ltd
Mr. Chris CHAN	General Mills Hong Kong Ltd
Ms. Claire CHAN	Hago Limited
Ms. Susanna HO	HKFORT
Mr. Peter Johnston	Hong Kong Retail Management Association
Ms. Vivian LAM	Hong Kong Standard & Testing Centre
Mr. Gary LO	Hong Kong Yakult Co., Ltd.
Ms. YU Ka Man	Hop Fat Company
Ms. Christy LEE	Hop Fat Company
Mr. CHAN Chi Ming	Hop Hing Oil Factory Limited
Ms. Jeanie CHAN	Hop Hing Oil Group Limited

Mr. Ronald CHOW	Hung Fook Tong
Ms. CHAN Lai Shan	Hutchison China MediTech Limited
Ms. Christine LEE	Hyakunousha International Ltd
Ms. Leona HO	IKEA
Mr. Marco LO	Institution of Dining Art
Mr. Kenneth KWAN	International Food Safety Association
Ms. May KAN	International Food Safety Association
Ms. Katherine LEUNG	International Food Safety Testing Centre Limited
Ms. AU Wing Sum	Island Shangri - la hotel
Ms. Amy MOU	Itochu Hong Kong Ltd
Mr. CHOW Tin Yam	Japan External Trade Organization
Ms. Alice WONG	Lee Kum Kee International Holdings Ltd
Ms. Faye LEUNG	Mannings
Ms. Rita HO	Maxim's Caterers Ltd
Ms. WAN Yuen Ting	Maxim's Caterers Ltd
Ms. CHAN Yuen Han	Maxim's Food Factory
Ms. Wendy CHAN	McDonald's
Ms. Amy CHU	Mead Johnson Nutrition (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Mr. WONG Pui Sum	Natural Alliance Co., Ltd
Mr. Joseph MA	Nestle Hong Kong Ltd
Ms. Vien POON	New Zealand Focus (HK) Ltd
Ms. Tina CHUI	NewSOKA International (Hong Kong) Limited
Mr. Herbert LEE	Nissin Foods (H.K) Management Co., Ltd
Ms. LO Kit Mui	Nu Skin Enterprises Hong Kong , LLC
Ms. German CHEUNG	Pappagallo Pacific Ltd
Ms. Tammy TANG	Parkshop (HK) Limited
Ms. May LO	Pizza Express (HK) Ltd
Ms. Julie YU	Pizza Hut HK Mgt. Ltd
Mr. TSUI Yue	Plaza Premium Lounge Management Limited
Ms. Sarah LEUNG	PrizeMart Limited
Mr. Kenneth LAM	Prominent International (environmental) Limited
Mr. Lewis HAU	Saraya (Hong Kong Sales) Co., Ltd
Ms. Winnie CHU	Satay King (Holdings) Co., Ltd
Ms. Amy YIP	Sims Trading Co., Ltd
Ms. Sharon WONG	Sino Hotels
Mr. Nick LEUNG	Snow Brand Hong Kong Co., Ltd
Ms. Antonia Martinez Ferreras	Spanish Trade Commission
Mr. WONG Kam Chuen	Swire Coca-Cola HK Ltd
Mr. LAI Sing Hin	The Association for Hong Kong Catering Services

	Management Ltd.
Mr. POON Kuen Fai	The Association for Hong Kong Catering Services Management Ltd.
Ms. LEUNG See Man	The Dairy Farm Group
Mr. LING Tsun Kit	The Garden Co. Ltd
Ms. Kammy YEUNG	The Hong Kong Standards and Testing Centre Ltd
Ms. Abby WONG	Tingyi-Asahi Beverages Holding Co., Ltd
Ms. NG Mei Ling	Tong Shun Hing Poultry (HK) Co., Ltd
Ms. Wing CHEUNG	Unilever Hong Kong Limited
Mr. Attlee LAU	URC Hong Kong Co Ltd
Mr. CHAN Chi Kong	Vitasoy International Holdings Ltd
Ms. Sheena TAM	Wellcome Fresh Food Centre
Mr. LEE Kam Ying	Windy - City International Limited
Mr. LAM Tsz Mau	Winner Foods Products Ltd
Ms. Amy FU	Wyeth (Hong Kong) Holding Co. Ltd

### **Opening Remarks**

The Chairman welcomed all trade representatives to the 58<sup>th</sup> meeting and introduced government representatives to the meeting.

### **Confirmation of the Notes of Last Meeting**

2. The notes of last meeting were tabled in the meeting for the trade representatives' comments, if any, on or before 3 April 2017 before confirmation.

### **Agenda Item 1**

#### **Joint Study with Consumer Council on Sodium in Meal-on-one-plate**

3. Ms. Alam NG briefed the meeting of the result of the Joint Study with Consumer Council (CC) on Sodium Content in Meal-on-one-plate (MOOP). Sodium is essential for

body functions, but excessive intake of sodium might have higher risk of developing high blood pressure. Untreated high blood pressure can lead to chronic diseases such as heart attack and stroke. According to WHO's sodium intake recommendation, the daily intake of sodium of an average adult should be less than 2,000 mg (5 g of salt, slightly less than 1 level teaspoon of salt), and that a target of reducing the dietary intake of salt by a relative 30% by 2025 was also recommended. The Government attached much importance to the reduction of salt and sugar levels in food. Given that healthy eating was one of the keys to reducing the intake of salt and sugar in food, the Department of Health (DH) and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had done a lot in promoting healthy eating habits through collaboration with the food trade, schools and other stakeholders. The Government established the "Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food" in 2015, which is responsible for making recommendations to the Secretary for Food and Health on the formulation of policy directions and work plans to reduce the intake of salt and sugar by the public, as well as to reduce salt and sugar in food. The "International Advisory Panel (IAP) on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food" established in early 2014 also considered that priority should be accorded to product reformulation, and target level for reformulation needs to be set. Product reformulation should gradually reduce the amount of sodium (salt) in food. According to WHO, high proportions of sodium in the diet came from salt added in cooking and from sauces in Asian countries; and MOOP was one of the categories of staple food in local daily diet. Hence, the CFS and CC conducted this joint study. The objectives of the study were to measure and compare among food outlets the levels of sodium (salt) in local MOOP dishes, to inform and assist the public to make informed choices when eating out, and to encourage the trade to provide MOOP items with less sodium through recipe reformulation. The scope of the study covered six types of rice and four types of noodles commonly available in local restaurants, and included both non-prepackaged and prepackaged MOOP. The sampling period was from July to

September 2016, 100 samples of non-prepackaged MOOP from Chinese restaurants, Western restaurants, Asian restaurants, HK style cafes and fast-food restaurants and eight samples of prepackaged MOOP from supermarkets and retail outlets were collected. There were 10 types of MOOP, including steamed rice with curry beef brisket, baked pork chop with rice, steamed rice with bean curd sheet and roasted pork, steamed rice with barbecued pork, fried rice in Fujian-style, steamed rice with chicken in scrambled egg sauce, Spaghetti Bolognese, fried rice noodles with sliced beef, braised E-Fu noodles, fried noodles with preserved vegetable and spare rib. For non-prepackaged samples, 10 samples were collected from each type of MOOP; while for prepackaged samples, 2 samples of steamed rice with curry beef brisket, 3 samples of baked pork chop with rice and 3 samples of Spaghetti Bolognese were taken. Testing was conducted by the Food Research Laboratory of CFS. For non-prepackaged MOOP, sodium content was tested. To understand the effect of the addition of sauce on the sodium content of MOOP, 3 additional samples of “steamed rice with barbecued pork without sauce” were collected for sodium content analysis. As for prepackaged MOOP products, sodium contents as declared on nutrition labels were referred to. For data analysis, according to the existing Nutrition Labelling Regulation in Hong Kong, if the sodium content per 100 g of food is less than or equal to 120 mg, the sample was referred to as “Low sodium (salt)”. The amount of sodium intake from MOOP was compared with WHO’s recommendation, i.e. less than 2,000 mg of sodium (5 g of salt) per day. When considering taking 3 meals a day, the sodium content of a portion of MOOP sample was compared with one-third of WHO’s recommended daily limit. The findings were that for non-prepackaged MOOP, ‘Fried noodles with preserved vegetable and spare rib’ had the highest mean sodium content per 100 g, while ‘Steamed rice with bean curd sheet and roasted pork’ had the lowest. Sodium content varied quite widely among restaurants within certain MOOP types. Only one out of the 100 samples was regarded as ‘low sodium’ while all samples had exceeded one-third of WHO’s recommended daily sodium limit. For the same

type of MOOP, prepackaged items could be higher or lower in sodium content when compared with the non-prepackaged counterparts. The possible ways to reduce sodium intake from MOOP included reducing the addition of sauce, reducing the consumption of gravy, and setting sodium reduction target for MOOP. The results showed that when having steamed rice with barbecued pork without consuming sauce, the reduced sodium intake accounted for as much as ~30% of WHO's recommended daily limit. Similarly, when having steamed rice with curry beef brisket without consuming gravy, the reduced sodium intake reached a quarter of WHO's recommended daily limit on average. With reference to overseas practices on target setting on sodium/salt reduction as well as the recommendations of the IAP on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, two recommended options for setting sodium reduction target for MOOP: the 'maximum level approach' and the 'average/mean level approach' were discussed. The variation in sodium content within certain types of MOOP suggested that it would be practicably possible for the trade to reduce the sodium content in MOOP, and chained restaurants could take the lead to take action. The consumers were advised to limit the consumption of MOOP high in sodium and those containing ingredients with high salt content. When eating out, they could request no/less sauce to be added on MOOP, and ask for "less salt" or "less salty" option of the food. They could request dishes to be served separately from rice/noodles, and taste before adding gravy. They were also advised to beware of the portion size of MOOP and share with others when the portion size was large, and also take note of the nutrient content. The trade was advised to make reference to the CFS' "Trade Guidelines for Reducing Sodium in Foods" and reduce sodium content in MOOP through recipe reformulation e.g. reduce the use of salt or seasonings; and use more fresh ingredients, herbs and spices. They could serve sauce and dish in separate containers, use standard measuring spoons to add the required amount of sauce, or add sauce upon consumers' request. Apart from providing the standard portion size of MOOP, they could offer MOOP in smaller portion size for consumers to choose based

on their requirements. They could also display nutrition information (particularly sodium/salt) of MOOP on menus, price list and other printed matters.

4. Dr. Samuel YEUNG remarked that MOOP was widely popular among the general public in Hong Kong. The current Joint Study had revealed a very unsatisfactory situation in that, on average of these 100 samples, the sodium content of one plate of these meals already equalled to the upper daily intake limit recommended by the WHO, and that all samples failed when the sodium content was compared with one-third of WHO's recommended daily limit. The trade should be aware that the food that they made indeed would affect the health of the general population and the trade should take the matter seriously. He suggested the trade to take the following measures: (a) serve sauce in separate containers and to respond to consumers' request not to add sauce / add less sauce; (b) for meals that the dish (餸菜) and rice/noodle could be served separately, serve them separately (另上); and (c) reduce the sodium content in MOOP through recipe reformulation. He asked whether the trade was prepared to discuss with the Government concerning target setting for reduction of sodium content in food.

5. One trade representative commented that it would be easy to adopt measures (a) and (b) mentioned above (except for stewed rice) upon the instruction of consumers. For measure (c), it would be difficult to determine the target and it would also be more difficult for the small and medium enterprises to comply. The Chairman asked whether the big / chained restaurants had already had a set standard of production. For example, when adding salt and sugar, whether a fixed amount had already been set or it was determined by the chefs casually. The trade representative remarked that for big / chained restaurants they usually had a central kitchen for the preparation of food which would mainly focus on the taste of the food items but not the amount of salt and sugar added. The amounts of salt and sugar to be added



would be determined by the chefs who would be influenced by the preference and expectation of their respective customers. The Chairman hoped that there would be new ideas in handling the matter. Based on overseas experience, it was understood that the initiative of reduction of salt and sugar in food could only be effectively carried out by setting reduction targets. Dependence on the preference of consumers would not achieve the result. The reduction target had to be adopted across the board to make it effective.

6. A trade representative suggested that a symbol (e.g. spoon(s) with salt) could be added beside the food items on a menu to indicate the degree of salinity. This could be easily understood by the public.

7. A trade representative remarked that it would be easy to implement measures (a) and (b). The next step would be reformulation which necessitated some further researches and studies. He opined that the publicity of healthy eating to increase the awareness of the public was very important. He did not agree to use one-third of WHO's recommended daily limit as a standard for comparison as people rarely consume MOOP for all three meals in a day. He also remarked that the names of restaurants being included in this Study should not be released to the press as they would be unnecessarily disturbed and affected. The Chairman replied that the CC had all along released the names of companies included in its studies in order to enhance transparency and to provide the necessary knowledge to its readers. As regards using one-third of WHO's recommended daily limit as a standard, he remarked that although consumers might not consume MOOP for all meals in a day, they did consume food with salt for all three meals.

## **Agenda Item 2**

### **Revision of Import Protocol for Chilled/Frozen Poultry from the Mainland**

8. Ms. LEUNG Mee Sze briefed the meeting of the revision on import protocol of chilled / frozen poultry from the Mainland. In January 2004, Hong Kong suspended the import of chilled / frozen poultry meat and viscera from the Mainland due to the outbreak of Avian Influenza in Hong Kong and other areas. Later in March 2004, Hong Kong and the Mainland authority agreed to resume the import of chilled / frozen poultry, but not poultry viscera. The arrangement was still in force. The current import requirements on chilled / frozen poultry were that the concerned Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau (CIQ) chop, with edible and durable red color, had to be stamped underneath the chilled chicken wing to distinguish them from chicken freshly slaughtered in Hong Kong. And that the CIQ anti-fake label had to be affixed on the packing of chilled poultry. The traders had requested the Government to consider removing the requirements. The CFS had agreed to the following revisions of the import requirements after discussion with the Mainland authority: to remove the requirement of having a red stamp underneath chilled chicken wing; to stop affixing a CIQ anti-fake label on packing of chilled poultry; to resume import of chilled / frozen poultry viscera from the Mainland; and to allow import of chilled / frozen quail from the Mainland. The revisions were planned to be implemented in the first half of this year.

### **Agenda Item 3**

#### **Nutrition Labelling and Difficulties Faced by the Trade**

9. Mr. HO Kwok Wai briefed the meeting that according to the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W), all prepackaged food, infant formulae, follow-up formulae and prepackaged food for infants and young children should be labelled with appropriate food labelling. Food labelling included general labelling and nutrition labelling. The Nutrition Labelling Scheme covered two main types of nutrition information on food labels of general prepackaged food: nutrition label and nutrition claim.

Nutrition label must include the information on energy and seven core nutrients (1+7). Nutrition claim referred to any representation which stated, suggested or implied that a food had particular nutritional properties. Food labels and advertisement were subject to control. For nutrition labelling, under Schedule 6 of Cap.132W, some food items are exempted from the nutrition labelling requirements: items with practical difficulties for the trade, items with no energy and core nutrients, items which were fresh in nature without any addition of ingredient, and prepackaged food with small sales volume. With effect from 1 October 2014, the CFS had tightened up its enforcement on non-compliance cases by doing away with the explanation period, as well as the practice of issuing warning letters and allowing time for rectifying any irregularities, and to initiate prosecution action immediately once identified. Since then and up to 10 March 2017, 78 prepackaged food products were found not complying with the Nutrition Labelling Scheme. Under the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling)(Amendment)(No. 2) Regulation 2014 (Amendment Regulation), the nutritional composition and nutrition labelling requirements for infant formula became mandatory since 13 December 2015, and the nutrition labelling requirement for follow-up formula and prepackaged food for infants and young children became mandatory since 13 June 2016. Infant formula must contain energy and 33 nutrients (i.e. “1+33”), and the level of energy and each nutrient must fall within the range specified in the Amendment Regulation. Infant formula must label the energy value and content of 29 nutrients (i.e. “1+29”). If the fluoride content of the product in a reconstituted or served basis exceeds the maximum level stipulated in the Amendment Regulation (exceeds 100 µg per 100 kilocalories or 24 µg per 100 kilojoules), the formula must be marked or labelled with a statement associated with dental fluorosis. Follow-up formula must label the energy value and content of 25 nutrients (i.e. “1+25”). Prepackaged foods for infants and young children must label the energy value, the contents of protein, total fat, carbohydrates and sodium, and the contents of vitamin A and vitamin D if they were added to the food. The existing Nutrition Labelling Scheme (i.e. 1+7)

will be applicable to infant formula, follow-up formula or prepackaged food for infants and young children if it is claimed in its descriptions or instructions for use to be suitable for consumption by persons of any age from 36 months onwards. Formula for special medical purposes for infants and young children (FSMP) marked or labelled with required information will be exempted from the requirements of nutrition composition and nutrition labelling. Infant formula and follow-up formula packed in a container with a total surface area of less than 250 cm<sup>2</sup> and prepackaged food for infants and young children packed in a container with a total surface area of less than 100 cm<sup>2</sup> would be exempted from the requirements of nutrition labelling. The trade was welcomed to raise their difficulties such as cost limitations or difficulties in obtaining nutrition information. Advice to the trade included understanding the definition of “Prepackaged Foods”. “Prepackaged food” means any food packaged, whether completely or partially, in such a way that the contents cannot be altered without opening or changing the packaging; and the food is ready for presentation to the ultimate consumer or a catering establishment as a single food item. The trade was also advised that general prepackaged food was required to include in its label nutrition information of energy and seven specific nutrients in prescribed format. Also, the Nutrition Labelling Scheme defined the standard conditions for nutrition claims to be made on the labels. The nutrition information of foods could be obtained by either direct chemical analysis of food samples or indirect nutrient analysis based on calculation. The trade would be held responsible for the accuracy of information provided on food labels. Manufacturers, importers, vendors, or any relevant parties, were recommended to engage laboratory testing to verify their own nutrition label declarations. As nutrient composition of foods might be different due to variations in seasons, processing practices and ingredient sources, it might lead to differences in the listed nutrient values among different product batches or products with different expiry dates. The CFS had developed tolerance limits for deviation in different batches of products. Nevertheless, food trader had to step up quality control of the

product if the deviation was very large. Any person who sold prepackaged food without nutrition labelling would be liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for 6 months. The trade was also advised to find out information related to nutrition labelling in the CFS website and the relevant Technical Guidance Notes and Method Guidance Notes.

10. One trade representative remarked that the tolerance limit of 20% variation for nutrient content for sodium and saturated fatty acids was too low as the quantities of the two substances were usually low and it would be easy to have variation exceeding 20%. He asked whether the tolerance limits for these two nutrients could be relaxed. Another trade representative remarked that the authority in the USA seldom tested the nutrients in low levels. The Chairman remarked that the enforcement action in Hong Kong was somewhat more stringent.

11. One trade representative suggested the CFS to review the current practice of issuing rapid alert to trade and press release about the trade's non-compliance to the nutrition labelling requirement and demanding removal from sale. He remarked that the non-compliance might only involve small quantities of the nutrients but it would have negative impacts on the goodwill of the company concerned. Even if it was considered necessary to issue the rapid alert and press release, would the CFS consider classifying the alert into different categories of severity in terms of the incident's effect on public health. The Chairman replied that in response to a similar request made in a previous meeting on the treatment of such non-compliances, the CFS had provided more information to the public in the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the related web page of the CFS that the items could be sold after labels corrected. The public announcement was considered essential in enhancing transparency to the public but it would be subject to regular review.

12. Another trade representative quoted that some kinds of food including 'cutlet pork chop'

and 'pork belly' of 'lap mei' cannot be homogenized and remarked that variations in nutrient content would inevitably exist from batch to batch in these food. He asked whether the tolerance limits for such products could be relaxed. He also asked whether it was necessary to collect 12 samples for testing, and if so, whether it could be indicated in the technical guidelines. The Chairman replied that the CFS would try to collect 12 samples for testing as far as possible, unless there was practical difficulty in collecting enough samples. The trade should make reference to the tolerance limit in providing accurate information on nutrition labels.

13. One trade representative quoted a non-compliance case publicized on the CFS webpage and said that the overstatement of sodium content on the nutrition label (i.e. 9 mg/100 g compared with the testing result of 4 mg/100 g) was insignificant since it was quite close to the definition of zero for sodium (i.e. 5 mg/100 g), and asked whether the case could be exempted from prosecution. The Chairman replied that the CFS would consider the matter, while reference was only made to the tolerance limits without considering the level of the nutrient content in the past.

14. Another trade representative remarked that subsequent to the publication of the technical guidelines some years ago, there had been quite a lot of supplementary and additional information on the subject which appeared in different locations on the CFS webpage. The trade would need to spend much time and effort to find out such information from the webpage. He asked whether the technical guidelines could be revised incorporating all these information. He also said that according to overseas experience, they seldom undertook prosecution action or made public announcement for non-compliance cases which would not have adverse health effects. He suggested the CFS to follow such practice in order not to cause unnecessary panic among the public. He also remarked that the CFS should not make sodium equivalent to salt, since sodium also exist in some vitamins and minerals. Mr. HO

Kwok Wai remarked that the Nutrition Labelling Scheme required the indication of sodium content on the nutrition label while any nutrition claims made on salt must meet the respective conditions of claims on sodium. The Chairman remarked that the CFS would review the technical guidelines to see whether a revision of its content was required. Another trade representative commented that China had revised the nutrient reference values in 2013 and suggested the CFS to make reference to them in the revision of technical guidelines, and allow time for the trade to comply.

15. Another trade representative remarked that for some products purchased from the wholesale market in Japan, there was limited information on the nutrient contents and additives and the company had to translate the information from the packings with substantial difficulties. She suggested the Government could discuss with the authorities of some major importing countries like Japan and EU and make agreement on mutual recognition of food labels. This would ensure correctness of information and would save the processing time and cost of the trade. The Chairman remarked that there was no international practice of mutual recognition of food labels as the requirements of different countries differed. Imported products for sale had to abide by the regulations in Hong Kong. Another trade representative agreed with the Chairman and said that the labelling requirement and labelling method of different countries were not the same and the trade could not copy the foreign labels to products on sale in Hong Kong.

16. One trade representative referred to the database of Nutrient Information Inquiry System of the CFS and mentioned that some food did not have information on energy and seven core nutrients (1+7). She suggested the CFS to conduct some more testing and provide more information to the trade. She also asked whether Hong Kong could accept the unit ‘公克’ used in nutrition label in Taiwan, so as to save the trade’s effort on re-labelling. Mr. HO

Kwok Wai replied that the unit for nutrient content expression on the nutrition label had been set out by the law and also provided in the technical guidelines and the Chairman agreed to consider the matter after the meeting.

[**Post- meeting note:** In accordance with Schedule 5 of the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W), nutrient contents should be expressed in gram (克) (g), milligram (毫克) (mg) or microgram (微克) (μg) on nutrition label. So, it is unacceptable to use “公克” to express nutrient contents on nutrition label.]

17. One trade representative remarked that with regard to sodium, saturated and unsaturated fats, the content in food would fluctuate in low quantities. Hence, the European Union would allow a tolerance limit within certain absolute amount for nutrients in low quantities. The Chairman replied that the CFS would study the matter.

18. In response to a request from a trade representative for assistance in compiling nutrition labels for products from Japan, the Chairman informed that assistance might be sought from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

#### **Agenda Item 4**

#### **Updated Advice on Washing Vegetables to Reduce the Potential Risk of Pesticide Residues**

19. Mr. Arthur YAU briefed the meeting of the updated advice on washing vegetables to reduce the potential risk of pesticide residues under the domestic environment. Back in late 1987, a large number of food poisoning outbreaks due to consumption of imported vegetables began to surface, peaking at 1988 with 303 confirmed cases and affected 491 persons. The outbreaks dropped off in 1989 and 1990 but resurfaced in lesser extent from



1991 to 1995. These outbreaks before 1996 were mainly caused by methamidophos, where levels up to 200 mg/kg were found. Control measures were introduced with close liaison with the Mainland authorities. The Man Kam To Food Control Point had also played an indispensable role in screening imports. Since then, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) had not identified any confirmed cases of food poisoning caused by pesticide residues in the past 11 years. With the enactment of the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation on 1 August 2014, control was further strengthened. Between 1 August 2014 and 2016, the CFS took about 91,700 food samples for testing of pesticide residues, and overall only 0.2% was found not complying with the legal requirement. The First HK Total Diet Study (TDS) found that the dietary exposure of consumers to more than 100 varieties of pesticides was much lower than the safety reference values. Of the pesticides studied, it was very unlikely that the population of Hong Kong would be exposed to excessive amount of pesticide residues through diet. As exposure to pesticide residues was no longer an imminent risk, the CFS had reviewed the advice on washing vegetables that was introduced some two decades ago when food poisoning caused by pesticide tainted vegetables was common. It was understood that extended soaking of vegetables in water would lead to unnecessary loss of water soluble nutrients. Many international / national authorities recommended washing of vegetables under clean running water. Some authorities recommended peeling and scrubbing of hard produce to reduce bacterial and pesticide load and to trim damaged parts. Some authorities had specifically not recommended the use of soaps, special detergents or commercially produced washes for home use due to the concern of introducing a new source of chemical residues. Studies on the effect of washing on various pesticide residues have also been reviewed. It is noticed that while soaking for 5 to 20 minutes can reduce some pesticide residues, the effect of further soaking would be relatively small. In the past, the CFS had recommended blanching and removal of outer leaves when preparing vegetables for the purpose of reducing pesticide residues levels. With the present level of pesticide residues in

vegetables, blanching, soaking and removal of outer leaves were no longer considered necessary for this purpose, even though it was generally understood that food processing steps like cooking could contribute to the reduction. This was in line with the current recommendations of many food safety authorities. The updated advice was: “Wash vegetables thoroughly under clean running water. When appropriate, scrub produce with hard surfaces with a clean produce brush to remove dirt and substances including pesticides and contaminants from the surface and the fissures. Use of soaps, special detergents or produce washes is not recommended. Soaking in water and blanching are effective in terms of removing dirt and reducing pesticide residues, but they are no longer considered necessary in the face of nutrient loss in the processes.” For more details, the trade might refer to an article published in the Food Safety Focus (128<sup>th</sup> Issue).

20. The Chairman remarked that the current updating was based on the latest risk assessment on the minimal presence of pesticide residues in vegetables and had been endorsed by the Expert Committee on Food Safety. It was understood that the previous recommendation was already deep in the minds of the public and they might need time to make behavioral changes.

21. In response to an enquiry from a trade representative, Mr. Arthur YAU informed that washing vegetables in running water had been widely accepted by many countries as an effective means to clean vegetables with assistance of the force of water. In response to an enquiry from another trade representative, the Chairman informed that there was no stipulation on the length of time of rinsing. He said that the cleaning of vegetables was not only aiming at removal of pesticide residues, but also removal of other surface contaminants like soil and heavy metals.

#### **Any Other Business**

## **Import Ban of Brazilian Meat and Poultry**

22. The Chairman informed that in response to the incident of doubtful quality of meat exported from Brazil and the Government's import ban, a Special Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum had been held on 23 March 2017 to brief the trade of the updated situation and to listen to the views and feedbacks from the trade. He regretted that due to oversubscription some trade representatives were unable to attend the last meeting. He would like to take this opportunity to update the trade of the developments in the past week and to hear the views and comments from more trade representatives. He introduced Mr. Peter TSANG to update trade representatives of the latest revisions in control measures adopted by the Government.

23. Mr. Peter TSANG briefed the meeting of the latest announcement of the revised control measures on 28 March 2017 evening. With immediate effect the import ban on Brazilian meat and poultry was restricted to exports from the 21 companies which were under investigation by the Brazilian authorities. For the meat and poultry from these companies which were being shipped prior to the import ban but not yet arrived in Hong Kong, the CFS would mark and seal the products upon their arrival for proper handling after the completion of the relevant investigation. Other than imports from these 21 companies, import and sale of Brazilian meat and poultry could resume. The Chairman supplemented that of the 21 companies concerned, only six companies were found exporting meat and poultry to Hong Kong, accounting for only 1% – 2% of the total quantity of Brazilian meat and poultry imported. Hence the supply of Brazilian meat and poultry would largely resume normal.

24. One trade representative commented that he was glad to hear the latest news. He hoped that the CFS could inform the media that the amount of Brazilian meat now banned only

represented a small percentage of the total imports from the country in order to restore the confidence of consumers. He asked whether the meat products of these 21 companies already imported into Hong Kong would be recalled.

25. One trade representative thanked the Government for adopting his suggestion raised in the Special Meeting for handling this special case with special method. He understood that the suppliers of meat had lowered the price when compared with last week and hoped the CFS could quickly resolve the matter with close contact with the Brazilian authorities. The Chairman remarked that the Government had considered the views of the trade in formulating the control measures and would communicate well with the media. The release from store of the previously banned meat would have a positive impact on the price level.

26. Another trade representative enquired what kind of test had been performed by the CFS on the food samples concerned. Mr. Peter TSANG informed that so far 66 samples had been tested and the tests include TVN. The Chairman supplemented that items tested covered matters of concern by the media and the public, such as rotten meat and additives. The test for rotten meat was the Total Volatile Nitrogen which was an indicator for deterioration. Other items such as veterinary drugs, heavy metals, preservatives, etc. were also tested.

27. One trade representative thanked the CFS for prompt answering of her queries in the last weekend. She asked whether a hotline could be established during similar crisis to serve as a proper channel for answering the questions of the trade. The Chairman replied that there was a hotline for answering general enquiries during office hours. The CFS would set up a special telephone hotline for incidents that had a lot of enquiries. [Post meeting notes: CFS contact telephone numbers during office hours and non-office hours specific to the incident are normally available in individual rapid alert issued by CFS.]

28. The Chairman remarked that the CFS would continue to closely monitor the case and maintain close contacts with the Brazilian authorities to keep abreast of the most updated situation. The control measures in force would be further adjusted as and when required.

### **Food Safety Seminar 2017**

29. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Food Safety Seminar 2017 would tentatively be held on 7 July 2017 at the Central Library. This was a biennial event with an aim of introducing to the trade the new legislations and guidelines established in the past two years and other areas of concern. The trade would be invited to join and suggestions / contributions to the discussion topics would be welcome.

### **Communication with the Trade**

30. One trade representative remarked that in the current incident press release was issued to the media before the trade was informed. He asked whether the CFS could simultaneously inform the trade and the media through rapid alert and press release. It would help the trade to respond to the media and public enquiries better. Dr. Samuel YEUNG replied that in the existing rapid alert system the trade was informed of an incident through fax and email messages after the issue of press release. The CFS would look into whether the lead time for issuing rapid alerts could further be shortened. The trade representative remarked that it would help if the trade was alerted through Short Message Service (SMS) that a press release had been issued so that they could check the content of the release and react accordingly. The Chairman remarked that the CFS would examine the issue and agreed that it was important to have efficient communication with the trade on food incidents so that they could respond to public enquiries better.

31. Another trade representative remarked that for many cases the press release was issued after office hours and if the alert was not yet issued to the trade and suppliers, it would make them nervous with insufficient information. He hoped that the communication with the trade could be improved.

32. Another trade representative suggested that the CFS could make reference to the food alert system of the USA. Food alerts were categorized into three levels and they issued the alerts to the public through email.

### **Heavy Metals in Foods**

33. One trade representative remarked that scallop was not indicated as a contributory food item for dietary exposure to the heavy metal cadmium. He understood that the CFS had previously tested for the substance in scallop and wanted to know the standard and action level for information. The Chairman remarked that for substances that were not specifically listed in the legislation, the CFS would conduct risk assessment to ensure that the food concerned was safe for human consumption. He informed that a working group had been established to review the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V) and to propose amendments to the Regulations. The draft amendments would soon come out and an informal consultation with the trade would be held by the end of May / early June before conducting the formal public consultation exercise.

34. One trade representative asked whether a specific type of mushroom could be regarded as vegetables in determining its level of heavy metals. The Chairman remarked that whether

mushroom could be classified as vegetables was still controversial. The standard to be adopted might be discussed in the coming public consultation. If there was no standard established under the law, risk assessment would be relied on. For both mushroom and vegetables, the quantities consumed by the public would be considered during risk assessment. The trade might as well make reference to the standards of other countries. Another trade representative suggested that the department should provide action level for some food without standard. The Chairman further remarked that action level would only be established for food items without legal standard that might be hazardous to the health of the public. The CFS would not recommend setting standards for food items which were consumed in relatively small quantities.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

35. The date of next meeting would be decided later.

36. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.