

# ***“No MSG”* labels on foods containing glutamate are misleading**



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**International Glutamate Technical Committee (IGTC)**

Brussels, Belgium

- Scientific association established in 1970
- A CODEX observer organization

c/o: Ajinomoto Co., Inc.  
Tokyo, Japan



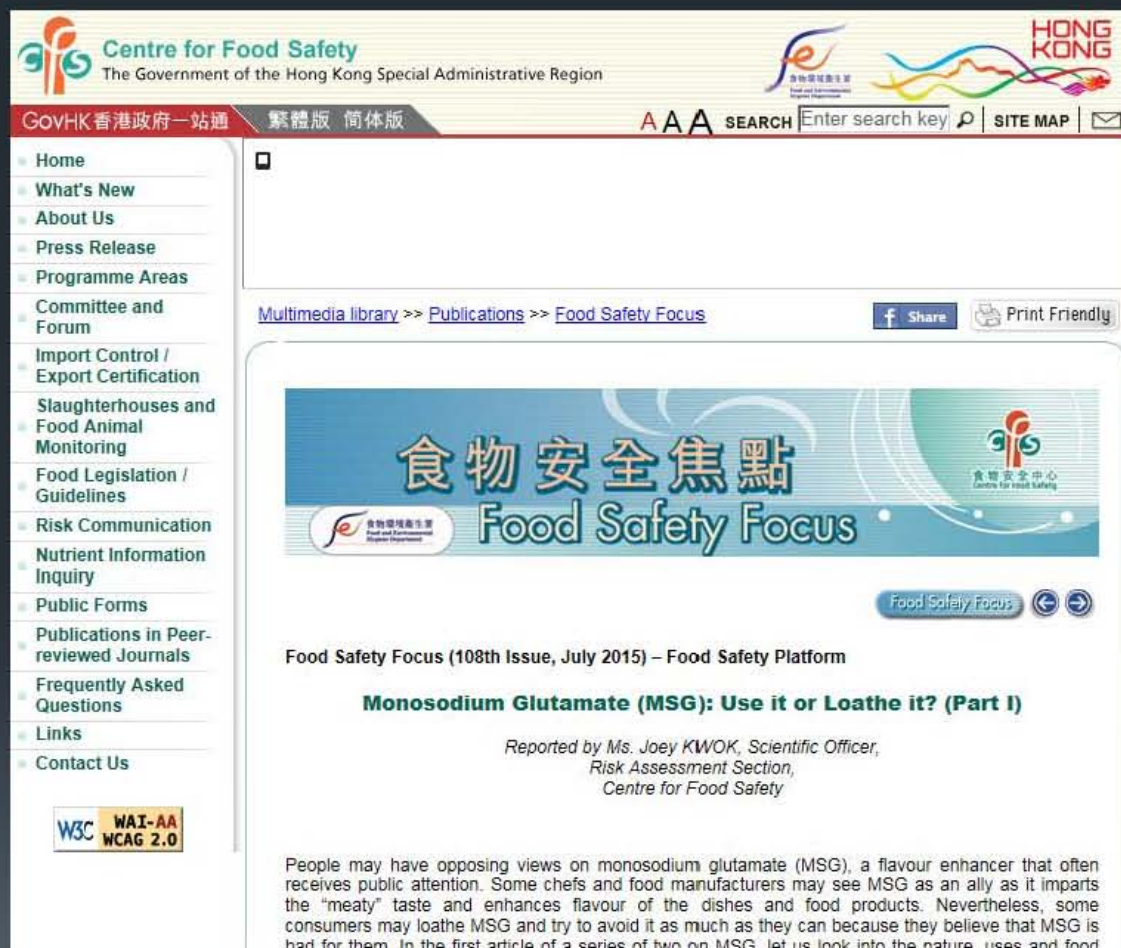
# INTRODUCTION

# MSG (sodium glutamate) is just one form of glutamate

- Glutamate is the most abundant amino acid in food/nature
- Glutamate stimulates savory taste (umami). Savory sauces (fish, soy, oyster, Worcester) or bouillons are very rich in glutamate.
- Human body does not distinguish MSG from other glutamates and metabolizes all glutamates identically

Vegetables (mg/100g)	
Cabbage	50
Spinach	48
Tomato	246
Green asparagus	49
Corn	106
Green peas	106
Onion	51
Mushroom	42

# MSG safety is a resolved matter (not a topic of this presentation)

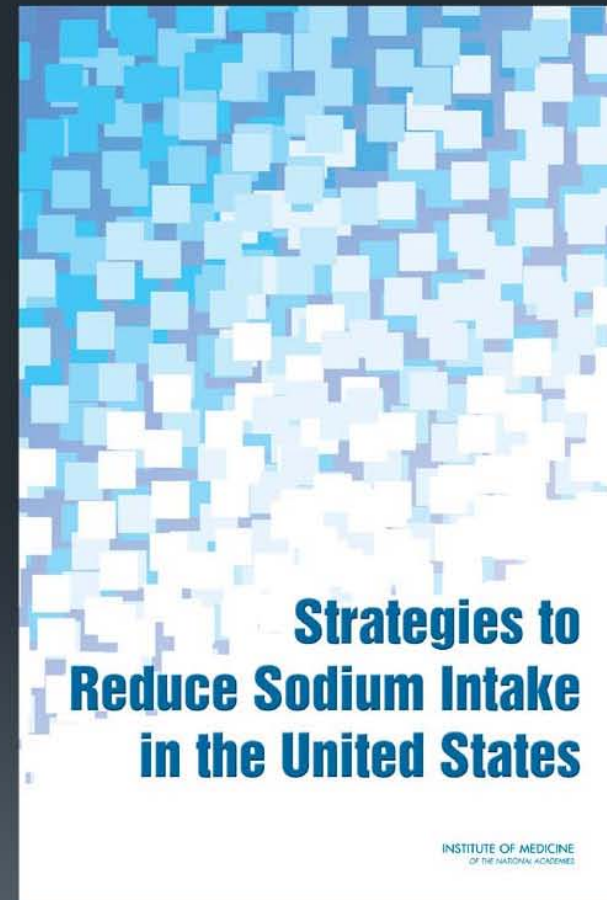


The screenshot shows the website of the Centre for Food Safety, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The header includes the logo, navigation links for 'GovHK 香港政府一站通', '繁體版', '简体版', 'SEARCH', 'SITE MAP', and 'Enter search key'. A left sidebar contains a list of links: Home, What's New, About Us, Press Release, Programme Areas, Committee and Forum, Import Control / Export Certification, Slaughterhouses and Food Animal Monitoring, Food Legislation / Guidelines, Risk Communication, Nutrient Information Inquiry, Public Forms, Publications in Peer-reviewed Journals, Frequently Asked Questions, Links, and Contact Us. The main content area displays the 'Food Safety Focus' banner with the title '食物安全焦點 Food Safety Focus'. Below the banner, it indicates 'Food Safety Focus (108th Issue, July 2015) – Food Safety Platform' and features the article 'Monosodium Glutamate (MSG): Use it or Loathe it? (Part I)' reported by Ms. Joey KWOK, Scientific Officer, Risk Assessment Section, Centre for Food Safety. The article text begins with 'People may have opposing views on monosodium glutamate (MSG), a flavour enhancer that often receives public attention. Some chefs and food manufacturers may see MSG as an ally as it imparts the "meaty" taste and enhances flavour of the dishes and food products. Nevertheless, some consumers may loathe MSG and try to avoid it as much as they can because they believe that MSG is bad for them. In the first article of a series of two on MSG, let us look into the nature, uses and food'.

[www.cfs.gov.hk/english/multimedia/multimedia\\_pub/multimedia\\_pub\\_fsf\\_108\\_02.html](http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/multimedia/multimedia_pub/multimedia_pub_fsf_108_02.html)

# Food Glutamates (etc., MSG) have important roles

1. Reduction of sodium intake  
(by app. 30% when replacing salt)
2. Improvement of salivary secretion (elderly)
3. Serving as the key source of energy for intestines  
(enabling protein digestion)



# MSG was recognized as natural

The USDA ruled that MSG, produced by fermentation, is natural (Dec. 2011)



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food Safety and  
Inspection  
Service

Office of Policy,  
Program & Employee  
Development

Washington, DC  
20250-3700

December 2, 2011

Mr. Martin J. Hahn  
General Counsel  
The Glutamate Association  
P.O. Box 14266  
Washington, D.C. 20044-4266

Dear Mr. Hahn,

This letter is in response to your letter dated May 23, 2011, which you submitted on behalf of The Glutamate Association (TGA) appealing the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Labeling and Program Delivery Division's (LPDD), decision to deny the use of monosodium glutamate in meat and poultry products bearing "natural" claims.

LPDD has reconsidered its decision and will permit the use of monosodium glutamate derived from natural materials, containing no artificial flavoring, coloring, chemical preservative, or any other artificial or synthetic ingredient, and that is a product of fermentation and other physical treatments that FSIS has considered "minimally processed" in meat and poultry products bearing "natural" claims. This includes glutamate manufactured through acid hydrolysis or chemical synthesis in meat and poultry products bearing "natural" claims.

As described in your original request and clarified in your appeal, monosodium glutamate was first produced by the acid hydrolysis of vegetable proteins. Later, monosodium glutamate was produced by chemical synthesis using acrylonitrile as the starting material. FSIS considers these traditional production methods to be more than "minimal processing." However, the process by which the majority of monosodium glutamate is now produced begins with fermentation. Specifically, the fermentation process begins using bacteria from genera such as *Brevibacterium*, *Arthrobacter*, *Microbacterium*, and *Corynebacterium* or various species of yeast. Carbohydrate sources (e.g., corn and tapioca) are used as starting material with other nutrients. When the glutamate levels reach the optimal concentration, the fermentation broth is then processed through specific combinations of heat, filtration, and other treatments to produce the final product.

... will permit the use of MSG derived from natural materials, containing no artificial flavoring, coloring, chemical preservative, or any other artificial or synthetic ingredient, and that is a product of fermentation and other physical treatments that FSIS has considered "minimally processed" in meat and poultry products bearing "natural" claims. . .



# LABELING

# US FDA Policy on “No MSG” Claims



FDA does not permit “No MSG” claims on foods with naturally occurring free glutamate

November 2012 FDA Q&A on MSG:

- *“... foods with any ingredient that naturally contains MSG cannot claim “No MSG” or “No added MSG” on their packaging.”*
- *Recognized MSG occurs naturally in HVP, autolyzed yeast, hydrolyzed yeast, yeast extract, soy extracts, and protein isolate, as well as in tomatoes and cheeses*

# US FDA Policy on “No MSG” Claims



2004 Warning Letter (a food containing oyster sauce)

*“FDA has repeatedly advised consumers and industry that it considers such claims as “No MSG” and “No added MSG” to be misleading when they are used on the labels of foods made with ingredients that contain substantial levels of free glutamate”*

## Other countries



- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the FSA of the UK and Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) stated that a “no MSG” claim was not acceptable on a product with detectable glutamate.
- the Codex Standards also stated that,  
*“Prepackaged food shall not be described or presented on any label or in any labeling in a manner that is false, misleading or deceptive or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding its character in any respect.”*

# Hong Kong situation

- Food companies are using “no MSG” or “no additive” (negative campaigns) as aggressive marketing tools.
- The Hong Kong Public Health & municipal Services Ordinance (No. 132) governs labeling of foods in Hong Kong.
- The Ordinance says that labeling should not mislead as to food nature, substance or quality.

# Analysis and Discussion

## Negative MSG claims on products with detectable glutamate:

- **are misleading**, because “No MSG” or “No added MSG” leaves consumers with the impression that product does not contain glutamate.
- **undermine** perception of MSG, feed distrust of the general public to **food companies**, and decrease standing of **regulatory bodies**.
- **do not solve any issue**, as they push food companies to replace one form of glutamate with another (savory sauces etc).

**IGTC respectfully asks the Centre for Food Safety to consider forbidding “no MSG” claims on food with detectable glutamate**