Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Notes of the Fifty Fourth Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum
held on 17 June 2016 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)	
Ms. Jacqueline FUNG	Scientific Officer (Nutrition)	
Mr. Johnny CHU	Scientific Officer (Toxicology)	
Dr. Ivan CHONG	Veterinary Officer (Risk Assessment)	
Mr. WONG Cheuk Ho	Superintendent (Risk Communication)	(Secretary)

Trade Representatives

Mr. NG Hin Yan	A-1 Bakery Co., (HK) LTD
Ms. LAI Kwun Ching	Abbott Laboratories Limited
Ms. Lilian TANG	Aeon Topvalu (Hong Kong) Co., Limited
Ms. Ada YIU	ALS Technichem (HK) Pry Ltd
Ms. Caroline YUEN	American Consulate General Hong Kong
Ms. Winnie TANG	Amoy Food Ltd
Ms. Frances CHEUNG	Australian Trade Commission
Mr. TSANG Wah Him	Calbee Four Seas Co. Ltd
Mr. LO Tim Lun	Castco Testing Centre
Ms. Jessica OU YANG	Catalo Natural Health Foods Ltd
Ms. LI Siu Ying	CFSS Co Ltd
Ms. Christine CHEUNG	China Dragon Inspection & Certification (HK) Ltd
Mr. Chi WONG	China Inspection Co. Ltd Testing Centre
Mr. Jack TSE	China Resources Ng Fung International Distribution Company Limited
Mr. Dennis CHAN	City Super Ltd
Mr. TSANG Yiu Yuen	CMA Testing and Certification Laboratories

Ms. May KAN	Coca-Cola China Ltd.
Mr. Houston WONG	Consulate General of Canada
Mr. Roy FUNG	Consulate General of Mexico in Hong Kong and Macao SAR
Ms. YIU Tsz Yau	Dah Chong Hong
Mr. Kenneth LAM	Enviro Labs Ltd
Mr. Roy HOU	Eurofins Food Testing Hong Kong Limited
Mr. Jason CHOI	Eurofins Food Testing Hong Kong Limited
Mr. Freddy FONG	Foodscan Analytics Ltd
Ms. Doris CHAN	Friesland Campina (Hong Kong) Ltd
Ms. Noel HO	Garden Heart Food Ltd
Ms. Peggie YAU	Hong Kong Health Food Association
Ms. Kathleen LEE	Hong Kong Infant and Young Child Nutrition Association
Mr. Peter Johnston	Hong Kong Retail Management Association
Mr. Ronald CHOW	Hung Fook Tong
Ms. Katrina NG	Hutchison China MediTech Limited
Ms. WAN Lok Man	Intertek Testing Services Hong Kong Ltd
Ms. AU Wing Sum	Island Shangri-La Hotel
Ms. MOU Yee Man	Itochu Hong Kong Ltd
Mr. CHOW Tin Yam	Japan External Trade Organization
Ms. Kennie SIU	Kellogg's Asia Marketing Inc.
Ms. Alice WONG	Lee Kum Kee International Holdings Ltd
Mr. Wilson SIU	M & S Industries Ltd
Ms. Faye LEUNG	Mannings
Ms. Winnie AU	Marks & Spencer
Ms. Amy CHU	Mead Johnson Nutrition (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Ms. Daisy CHAN	Nestle Hong Kong Ltd
Mr. Herbert LEE	Nissin Food Co., Ltd
Ms. German CHEUNG	Pappagallo Pacific Ltd
Ms. Catherine KONG	Parknshop (HK) Limited
Ms. May LO	Pizza Express (HK) Ltd
Ms. Tess WONG	Pret A Manger
Ms. Milk LEUNG	SFB Limited
Mr. POON Kuen Fai	The Association for Hong Kong Catering Services Management Ltd.
Ms. Leona HO	The Dairy Farm Company Ltd - IKEA
Ms. Sally LEUNG	The Dairy Farm Group
Mr. LING Tsun Kit	The Garden Co. Ltd
Ms. Anita LAI	The Hong Kong Food Council Limited
Ms. Kammy YEUNG	The Hong Kong Standards and Testing Centre Ltd

Ms. Po CHU	Truth & Faith International Ltd
Ms. TAN Wai Ping	Tsit Wing Coffee Co., Ltd
Ms. Wing CHEUNG	Unilever Hong Kong Limited
Ms. Winnie KWOK	Vitasoy International Holdings Ltd
Mr. LAM Tsz Mau	Winner Foods Products Ltd

Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all trade representatives to the 54th meeting and introduced government representatives to the meeting.

Confirmation of the Notes of Last Meeting

2. The notes of last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

Agenda Item 1

Joint Consumer Council Study on Sodium Content in Soups

3. Ms. Jacqueline FUNG informed the meeting that a joint study with the Consumer Council on the sodium content in soups had been conducted recently. Soups were chosen as the target of study because a total diet study undertaken by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) indicated that soups were the second major contributor to the total dietary sodium intake of the local adult population, subsequent to condiment and sauce. The objectives of the study were to provide an update on the levels of sodium (salt) contents in 13 types of common soups, compare the sodium contents in these products from different food outlets with a view to informing the public, and urge the trade to provide soups with less sodium through product reformulation. The scope of the study encompassed Chinese clear soups, Chinese thick

soups, Western soups, and Asian soups. A total of 130 samples of non-prepackaged and prepackaged soup products were collected for testing, and the amount of sodium intake from soup was compared with the WHO's recommendation of less than 2,000 mg sodium (5 g salt) per day. It was found that Chinese clear soups had the lowest average level of 191 mg per 100 g of soup, followed by Chinese thick soups, Western soups and Asian soups. There was also much variation in sodium content for different items within the same type of soup. Although the average sodium content of Chinese clear soups was lower, an average bowl (240g) could contribute a quarter of the recommended limit of daily sodium intake. With reference to the recommendations from the International Advisory Panel on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, product reformulation would be the most effective measure to reduce the sodium content in food. The data obtained in this study could be used as a reference to set sodium reduction target for soups. Three possible options for setting sodium reduction target would be the 'maximum level approach', 'average/mean level approach', and 'percentage reduction target approach'. The trade was advised to reform the recipes to reduce the sodium content in soups and monitor the effects, to provide nutrition information and suggested number of serves on menus, and to encourage customers not to add extra salt in soups. The consumers were advised to be aware of the amount of sodium intake through soups and maintain a balanced diet, and reducing the amount of salt when eating out at restaurants and making soups at home.

4. Dr. Samuel YEUNG remarked that from the angle of a consumer, he considered that soups served at food premises were in general salty. In this connection he had patronized a shop for the soup product which was tested to be amongst the lowest salt contents found in the study, he considered that the concerned soup product was not salty but tasty. He said that there was much room for improvement with respect to reducing the level of sodium in soups.

5. The Chairman asked for the trade's input and advice on the setting of sodium reduction targets. He understood that many members of the trade had indicated that they could reduce the sodium level in soups.

6. One trade representative remarked that the Government had been successful in promoting the general public to reduce the intake of salt in recent years. He wondered whether it was necessary to set a limit of sodium level in soups, and whether it was necessary to enforce the requirements by law. He also enquired whether the adverse effect of sodium absorbed by the human body could be diluted by drinking more water. The Chairman replied that initially the public would be informed and educated of the importance of reducing sodium consumption. By making reference to overseas experience, it was considered necessary to devise some standards to serve as a target for reduction. If the desired outcome could not be achieved, the possibility of legislation could not be ruled out. Dr. Samuel YEUNG remarked that adverse effect of sodium consumed could not be diluted by drinking more water. The Chairman added that consumption of food containing potassium might serve to offset the adverse effects of sodium.

7. Another trade representative remarked that there was also much room for educating the workers in the trade who might not have a correct concept of the importance of reduction of sodium in foods. The Chairman said that with the establishment of the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food, the Government would continue its study on the topic and would further discuss with the trade on the way forward.

Agenda Item 2

Ractopamine in Food

8. Dr. Ivan CHONG briefed the meeting of the topic 'Ractopamine in Food'.

Ractopamine was a veterinary drug used as a feed additive to promote growth and increase muscle leanness. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) had evaluated the safety of ractopamine and considered the substance not a direct carcinogen and not intrinsically genotoxic. Food safety concern was low compared with other beta agonists. The Codex had established Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for ractopamine hydrochloride in various tissues of cattle and pig. Internationally ractopamine was permitted for use in food producing animals in over 20 countries or jurisdictions (e.g. Australia, US, Canada, Japan), but not yet permitted in some other countries or jurisdictions (e.g. Mainland China and EU countries). Locally ractopamine hydrochloride had been registered as a pharmaceutical product in Hong Kong since 2007 for use in pigs as a growth promoter under a prescription given by a registered veterinary surgeon. It was not listed in schedules 1 or 2 of the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF). For veterinary drugs that were not listed in the schedules, a risk assessment would be conducted if detected in food of animal origin. CFS had established action levels for ractopamine in various animal products making reference to Codex standards. As inappropriate use of ractopamine might leave residues in edible tissues that were of health concern to consumers, the trade was advised to source meat and meat products from reliable suppliers, and to ensure that imported meat was accompanied by a valid health certificate from an approved source. Overseas suppliers and trading partners were reminded of the need to comply with Hong Kong legislation and make reference to CFS action levels when supplying concerned foods to the local market.

9. The Chairman remarked that the CFS would, as and when necessary, take food samples from the market to check the level of ractopamine in existence. If the action level was found exceeded, follow-up action would be taken. In the long run consideration would be given to amend the legislation to include ractopamine in the list of harmful substances.

10. One trade representative remarked that in a recent press release announcing that two beef samples were found to have ractopamine levels exceeding the MRL set by the Codex, the CFS had implied that the vendors concerned were wrong in selling the product. But actually the concerned MRL levels (at 13 and 14 parts per billion (ppb) respectively, slightly above the Codex limit of 10 ppb) were only around half of the limit set by the US authority (at 30 ppb). In addition, the product was legally imported from the US with official health certificates. He opined that the CFS should provide the full picture to the public so as not to cause undue concern. He also said that according to information from the US, surveillance of the same type of product had identified a MRL level of 8 ppb. He had some doubts on the accuracy of the testing result of the Government Laboratory. The Chairman appreciated the comments provided by the trade representative. He remarked that the CFS was aware of the standard adopted by the US. He also noted that other major importers had adopted the Codex standard. The CFS had communicated with the US authority that CFS had adopted the Codex standards as action levels in Hong Kong and would appreciate their compliance with our action levels. As regards the testing result, he remarked that the trade representative could liaise with the exporter and the US authority for further clarification.

11. In response to an enquiry of a trade representative, the Chairman confirmed that the Codex standard and action levels had been adopted and opportunity was taken to inform the trade in this Forum. In response to an enquiry of another trade representative, the Chairman replied that the action levels established were used for the reference and compliance of the trade and had not been legislated. Hence prosecution action might not be taken. The use of ractopamine was permitted in Hong Kong if the action levels were not exceeded.

Agenda Item 3

Glycoalkaloids in Potatoes

12. Mr. Johnny CHU briefed the meeting of the topic 'Glycoalkaloids in Potatoes'. In September 2015, the CFS was notified of a food poisoning case involving glycoalkaloid which was detected in the raw potato sample provided by the household. Glycoalkaloid was naturally present in potatoes which served as a defence against herbivores, pests and diseases. It would adversely affect human health involving two toxic mechanisms: (a) disruption of cell membrane and adversely affecting intestinal permeability, causing nausea, vomiting, stomach and abdominal cramps, and diarrhea; and (b) interference of message transmission between nerve cells, causing neurological effects like drowsiness, restlessness, shaking and disturbed vision. Although the Codex had not yet established any safety standard, internationally the generally accepted upper limit of glycoalkaloid which was considered safe to the human body was 200 mg/kg fresh weight. Glycoalkaloid was present throughout the potato plant, with the highest levels in flowers (at 2150 – 5000 mg/kg) and sprouts (at 2000 – 9970 mg/kg). The glycoalkaloid content in commercial cultivars of tubers was around 10 – 150 mg/kg, with the highest concentration in skin and peel (above the upper limit) and lowest concentration in flesh (at 12 – 100 mg/kg). The level of glycoalkaloid detected was different for different potato cultivars. Other factors affecting the level of glycoalkaloid included stresses during growth (such as unusual weather and insect attack), degree of maturity (immature tubers have higher metabolism and hence higher glycoalkaloid), and stresses after harvest (such as injury, light and storage temperature). As regards storage temperature, food authorities in major countries had recommended not to store potatoes in refrigerators or below 8℃ to avoid the formation of acrylamide (which might be hazardous to health) during the cooking process. The trade was advised to take measures to reduce the greening and sprouting of potatoes, know their cultivars and maturity levels, handle them with special care, display them in areas of low light intensity or pack them in appropriate bags, and keep them cool and dry. Mr. CHU finally introduced three articles, including one written by CFS, for the reference of the meeting.

13. The Chairman advised the trade to comply with the said upper limit with regard to potatoes on sale in the market. The CFS would collect samples for testing in future and might take enforcement action for products found exceeding the limit.

14. One trade representative remarked that in addition to the advice given to the trade, the Government should also educate the public on the proper way to store potatoes, to peel and to cut and discard the sprouts and other dangerous parts.

15. Another trade representative enquired whether the problem concerning Hong Kong was more of a storage problem, rather than a problem of cultivars. Mr. Johnny CHU replied that in Hong Kong the problem should not be acute as households would not store the potatoes for long and the sellers would not procure cultivars that taste bad or deteriorate easily. He said that the public should be mindful not to eat potato together with its skin. The Chairman added that the trade should take measures to identify potatoes turning green or sprouting and remove them from sale.

16. Another trade representative enquired whether the upper limit was also applicable to processed potato products like potato chips and French fries. Mr. Johnny CHU replied that in principle the upper limit of 200 mg/kg would also apply to these products. Nevertheless we would need to consider the quantity consumed and perform risk assessment to determine whether the product concerned was actually hazardous to health. As no international standard was available in this area, the trade was advised to use the upper limit set for fresh potatoes for their own and their suppliers' reference. He reminded that the toxic glycoalkaloid could not be decomposed under frying temperature.

Any Other Business

17. In response to an enquiry from a trade representative, the Chairman remarked that in accordance with Item 9 of Part 1, Schedule 6 of the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations, Cap. 132W, prepackaged food which does not have any energy value or contain any contents of core nutrients could be exempted from the nutrition labelling requirements.

Date of Next Meeting

18. The date of the next meeting was to be determined.

19. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:46 p.m.